

COMPOST BASICS, AUG 2019

What Is Compost?

Composting is the recycling of plant and organic kitchen waste as a fertilizer and soil amendment. Compost improves soil and plants by returning organic matter to the soil in a usable form. Compost helps break up heavy clay soils, improving its drainage. Compost is very environmentally friendly since you enhance the quality of your soil through recycling while reducing your solid waste disposal needs.

Compost is made from decomposing organic material, ideally a 10:1 mixture of carbon and nitrogen. Carbon (brown) usually comes from dried leaves and plants whereas nitrogen (green) comes from freshly cut plant material or mowed grass. Coffee grounds may be added to help heat the compost pile to kill weed seeds.

Do We Compost In Our Community Gardens?

Yes. The Briar Chapel Garden Club has had an active compost program for several years and it is an important part of our soil amendment program. We have two compost bins near the sheds at both Boulder Park and the Briar Patch. Bin #1 is where new contributions are placed and Bin #2 contains material that has already started to break down. Designated members of the Garden Club turn and sift the compost regularly, to speed decomposition, and determine when it's time to move material from Bin #1 to Bin #2 and from Bin #2 to our planting beds.

How Can I Participate In This Program?

Organic kitchen scraps and garden plants/weeds/trimmings can be put in Bin #1 in either garden:

1. Cut or shred compostable material into small pieces (about 3 or 4 inches). This facilitates breakdown. It also makes it easier to turn and aerate the compost pile.
2. Egg shells can be composted if they are crushed. If not crushed, they take a very long time to decompose.
3. Soil clinging to dead plants or weeds should be shaken off and not put in the compost pile. Clumps of soil make it too hard to turn the pile.
4. Woody, organic material (i.e., tomato vines, rosemary or lavender branches) is difficult to handle and slow to compost. Throw it on the ground next to the bins. When this material dries out, we can shred it for composting.

There is usually a pitch fork in the compost bin. If you are able to do so, toss a little semi-decomposed compost over your new contributions to deter pests.

The following should NEVER BE COMPOSTED:

1. Plastic bags or other trash including paper products. Both community gardens have garbage cans for trash.
2. Meat or bones.
3. Pet waste (i.e., kitty litter and dog droppings).
4. Diseased plants and weeds that have gone to seed. These should be put in bags for disposal. Brown, paper bags for garden waste are available in both garden sheds.