

COMPOST NOTES

VOLUME 10 • NUMBER 3

Dear Composters

Dear Composters:

As autumn nears its time to prepare for the flurry of fallen leaves and dead plants that nature bestows upon us. There's no doubt that composting can require some serious elbow grease this time of the year. But all the raking, shredding, and hauling has its reward – that black gold we'll eventually harvest.

Included in this issue is information on a variety of composting topics and events including our annual worm composting workshop and Broome County's compost bin sale. We hope you find this newsletter helpful, and welcome your questions and suggestions for future issues.

Cheers,

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Ask Dr. Compost



I have too many leaves to put in my compost bin; can I till them into my garden?

This is one of those questions that requires a qualified “yes, but...” response. Directly applying and tilling fallen leaves into a vegetable or annual garden is a great way to quickly manage large quantities of leaves. If the leaves are large like oak or maple leaves it helps if they are shredded before tilling them in. Don't till more than 4-5 inches of leaves at a time. You can also add a nitrogen source like grass clippings, alfalfa meal, or a little nitrogen fertilizer as you till in the leaves.

Now the qualifier, you can add too many leaves to soil and create nutrient imbalances that could harm crops. Most fallen leaves have a carbon to nitrogen ratio of 60:1 or higher. Ideally organic matter added to soil should have a carbon to nitrogen ratio of 30:1 or less to prevent nitrogen deficiencies. Adding a little nitrogen fertilizer or some grass clippings when you till the leaves in helps correct this problem, but you may also need to add more nitrogen in the spring. The best way to determine if you need to add more nitrogen is to test the soil in the spring.

Excessive phosphorus is another nutrient imbalance that could result from repeated heavy applications of leaves. Too much phosphorus can cause magnesium and calcium deficiencies. Again, the best way to check is to test the soil.

If you are the scientific type and would like more information on directly adding organic materials to soil, check out “Best Management Practices: Application of Organic Materials on Soils Used for Crop Production” by Ohio State Extension Service available at <http://ohioline.osu.edu/agf-fact/0211.html>

Worm Composting Workshop October 11th

A worm composting workshop for Broome County residents will be held on Thursday, October 11th at 6:30 p.m. Participants will receive a worm container made from a plastic tote bin, complete with bedding and some starter worms (one bin per household). You must attend the workshop to receive a bin. There is no charge for the workshop, but space is limited and registration is required. Please call (607) 584-9966 to register.

Compost Bin Sale

The Broome County Division of Solid Waste Management is now selling compost bins at a reduced price of \$36 plus tax at the Broome County Landfill. The landfill is located at 286 Knapp Road. To reach Knapp Road, take Airport Road towards the Greater Binghamton Airport, and turn left off Airport Road just before the airport. The landfill is located about 2 miles north on Knapp Road. The bins are made from recycled black plastic, and feature a locking lid and door for compost removal. Payment can be by check or cash, credit cards are not accepted. Landfill hours are 7 a.m. to 2:45 p.m. weekdays, 7 to 11:45 a.m. Saturdays. You may want to call the landfill at 763-4450 to check if see if bins are still available.

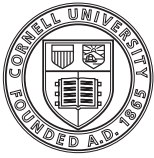
Leaf Management Options

- Chop and bag leaves; use the leaves throughout the year to mix with food scraps and other compost ingredients.
- Shred and moisten leaves and use them to make leaf mold (*compost made from leaves only*).
- Shred a thin layer of fallen leaves with a lawn mower and leave them on your lawn to decompose and release nutrients.
- Use shredded leaves as mulch around shrubs, trees and tender perennials.
- Chop and spread leaves thickly over annual beds and vegetable gardens to protect your soil. Or till the shredded leaves directly into the soil.



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Pet Waste Disposal

Veterinary experts advise against composting dog, cat, and bird feces because they can contain organisms that can cause human health problems. Dog manure may contain a roundworm called *Toxocara canis*. The eggs of this roundworm can remain alive in the soil for months or even years. Cat manure can contain cysts that cause toxoplasmosis. Pet bird droppings can also harbor transmittable diseases. These organisms may not be killed in a compost bin, and thus there is a risk to humans who handle the compost or eat crops from gardens amended with contaminated compost.

Pet manure can also be a significant source of pollution in urban and suburban watersheds, so take care to properly dispose of all pet manure. The Broome/Tioga County Stormwater Coalition web site provides the following guidelines for pet waste disposal. Scoop up pet waste. Flush it down a toilet, as long as it's not mixed with litter or other materials. This is the best method because your septic system or community sewage plant will treat the waste. Or seal the waste in a plastic bag and put it in the garbage. Never dump pet waste or plastic bags containing waste into a storm drain. Residents in rural areas can also bury pet manure under at least 5 inches of soil in an area away from water bodies, wells, children's play areas, and gardens used to grow food.

Leaf Shredding Safety

Shredded leaves decompose more quickly and are preferred over whole leaves when used for mulch. Please follow safety precautions when using power equipment to shred leaves. Safety glasses, hearing protection, and dust masks are all recommended, as is reading the safety guidelines provided by equipment manufacturers.

If you would like to receive this newsletter as an electronic file please email a request to saf222@cornell.edu

Upcoming Events



Book Recycling Fair Book Giveaway – September 24 & 25, 9 a.m. – 3 p.m.

Worm Composting Workshop – October 11, 6:30 p.m. Registration required, see details above.

Mushroom I.D. – October 16, 7 p.m. Call 584-9966 to register.

*Funding for this newsletter provided by the Broome County Division of Solid Waste Management
and the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation.*



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