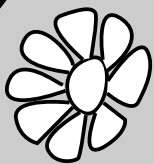


COMPOST



NOTES

VOLUME 11 • NUMBER 1

Dear Composters

Dear Composters:

I was recently watching a program on the Weather Channel that featured a New Jersey-based firm called Terracycle that produces a liquid plant fertilizer made from worm castings (*worm poop if you prefer*). The company packages the product in reused soda bottles in an effort to be as environmentally friendly as possible. Becoming “green” has become popular, and in some cases even profitable. One of the best ways to be green is composting at home. Products that are produced and mass marketed, however environmentally friendly they are, still need to be transported on trucks that burn fossil fuels. Compost made at home requires mostly good old elbow grease. So keep up the good work!

Cheers,
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Web Site: <http://counties.cce.cornell.edu/broome>



Ask Dr. Compost

Dear Dr. Compost:

I'm concerned about pests in my compost.

Are commercial compost bins really pest proof?

Some commercial bins are what I'd call pest resistant. Bins with lids and small ventilation holes or slots can deter animals like raccoons and skunks. I've yet to see a bin that would be able to stand up to a determined bear. Another issue is pests like mice, rats, and squirrels that can chew holes in plastic bins, or burrow underneath. In my experience these small rodents are the most common pest problem.

To minimize pest problems you should dig a hole in your compost and bury food scraps or cover them with a six inch layer of leaves or straw. Food scraps should never be visible on the surface of the compost. Kitchen wastes that are acceptable for home composting include fruit and vegetable scraps, coffee grounds, tea bags, and egg shells. Meat, fat, bones, and dairy products are more likely to attract pests and should not be added to your compost.

If you are following recommended practices and pests continue to be a problem one option is to limit your composting to yard waste and other items that are not attractive to pests. Bins that are resistant to nearly all pests (*except bears*) can be constructed using wire mesh hardware cloth or welded wire with very small openings (*1" x 1/2"*). To be truly pest resistant, these bins need to have a top and bottom. For more detailed information on this topic you can check out <http://cwmi.css.cornell.edu/nuisance.pdf>, or call (607) 584-5013 and request the free fact sheet: Preventing Animal Nuisances in Small Scale Composting.

Turn Your Compost This Spring

Many composters rarely or never turn their compost piles or bins. While turning is not essential, it is helpful even if you only do it once or twice a year. One of the best times to turn is in the spring, especially if you have an open pile or a bin without a lid. Over the course of the winter the composting materials get compacted which eliminates the air spaces so important to good oxygen flow in your compost. Rain and melting snow over the winter can also leave the materials in you bin or pile too wet. What little air space you do have may be filled with water.

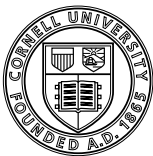
To thoroughly turn your pile in the spring the best tool is a four or five tine pitch fork, but a spading fork or even a round point shovel will work too. If you can, lift the bin off the compost or take it apart if it is easy to put back together. Now you are ready to refill the bin, or reform the pile. As you add materials back to the bin or pile try to place the material that was on the outside in the inside. You can also break up any clumps of leaves you find. If the compost looks too wet add some dry leaves, straw or wood shavings to soak up excess moisture. You may find that you have some finished compost on the bottom – harvest that for use.

Compost aeration tools are really handy for maintaining the air flow in compost, but they don't provide the thorough mixing described above. There is no getting around the fact that turning is hard work – but you will be rewarded for your efforts.



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Compost Bins Available

The Broome County Division of Solid Waste Management is selling compost bins at the Broome County Landfill at wholesale prices. The bins, called Earth Machines, are recycled black plastic holding bins with a capacity of 80 gallons. The bins cost \$38.88 including tax. For a limited time anyone who purchases a bin will receive a free container for collecting kitchen scraps. For more information call 778-2250.

Home Composting Workshop

Whether you are a novice or experienced composter you'll learn lots of helpful tips at the "Successful Home Composting" workshop on May 20th, 6:30 p.m. at Cornell Cooperative Extension of Broome County. At this demonstration-style workshop we will show participants how to select and prepare compost ingredients, demonstrate turning techniques, provide problem-solving tips, and discuss how to get the most from your finished compost.

Help Reduce Waste

To receive this newsletter as a pdf file email us a request at kjm8@cornell.edu (please provide your full name so we can remove you from the regular mail list).

Upcoming Events



May 6, 6-6:30 p.m. "HortShort" Pruning Roses.

Cutler Botanic Garden Gazebo. \$3.00, Walk-ins are welcome, registration is appreciated, 584-9966.

May 20, 6-6:30 p.m. "HortShort" Dividing Perennials.

Cutler Botanic Garden Perennial Garden. \$3.00, Walk-ins are welcome, registration is appreciated, 584-9966.

May 20, 6:30 p.m. Successful Home Composting.

At CCE-BC. Free. Call (607) 584-9966 to register. See details in newsletter.

Cutler Botanic Garden Plant Sale. June 7, 9 a.m. – 12:00 Noon. At CCE-BC.

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