How To Make An Organic Compost Pile



VIDEO

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TRANSCRIPT:

TERRY ALLAN:
Compost is the key to your successful organic garden. Whether you use a classic three bin system, a smaller enclosed bin or something of your own invention the basic process for building your own pile is the same.

Hi, I'm Terry Allan with SEEDS OF CHANGE™, and today we're here with Patrick Laherty, a really great organic home gardener. He's going to show us just how easy it is to make your own organic compost.

PATRICK:
We really believe that the compost is the difference maker in the vitality of the crops that we have on this property and the things that we grow.

TERRY:
That's great. Let's get started: So, first of all, what is compost?

Compost is a rich earthy material made up of leaves, grass clippings and whatever you have in your garden. Oh, it's full of worms, soil dwelling insects and bacteria, and they do the job of breaking down all of these natural materials to make the rich compost to keep our gardens growing.

You need four basic things to make good compost: you need fresh green materials, dry brown materials, air and water. The minimum size for an effective compost pile is one cubic yard, which is three feet by three feet by three feet. Start your compost pile with the first layer of rough, course material.

PATRICK:
Now, today's course material is fava, because we just harvested it. It's perfect for this situation. It's going to aerate the pile at the bottom, and it's going to give it some texture as it decomposes later on when I turn this pile.

TERRY:
Continue building your pile by alternating layers of green and brown materials. Brown materials are dry, and they can include dried leaves from the fall, straw, or any dried grass and weeds that you have around the yard. The brown layer provides carbon for the microbes diet.

PATRICK:
When I put my compost together and layering it — and you can see the fava at the bottom and we've got our brown layer going — I like to have the brown layer, or any of the layers, to be somewhere between three and four inches. Start to make your shape, because it's very important to make sure we get all the way out to the edge with this so that we don't start getting a pyramid instead of a cube.

TERRY:
After each brown layer, we need to sprinkle it with a little bit of water, so it's not too dry. Just like humans, microbes like moist, but not too wet, and then air.

After the brown layer, we're going to put on a green layer. Your green layer can include green weeds or grass from your garden; it can include old food scraps — ew! — and it can include animal manure, like horse manure. Even though this looks brown, it's really wet and full of nitrogen, so it's considered part of the green layer.

PATRICK:
Well, we finished off layers here — we have our first brown layer and we have our first green layer. But I really want to make a mention of the fact that when I put on a green layer it's not nearly as thick as the brown layer. The carbon ratio to the amount of nitrogen that you'll find in this green layer, needs to be much higher — 30% of all the ingredients is in the nitrogen layer, and the rest of it is in the carbon layer. And we've just finished up our first layering, this is much thinner than the brown layer that's below it.

Well, one of the things that I like to do on my compost pile is to give it a little bit of a kick start, and the way that I do that is by introducing some of the older compost that's composed of a lot of the microbe animals that are necessary for breakdown of the compost. I like to put a thin layer right here on top of this, and I might do it two or three times depending upon my load that I have of older compost.

TERRY:
If you don't have any animal manures for your compost, don't worry. You can just use the grass clippings from your lawn.

Avoid putting meat, or dairy products, or bones into your compost pile because it attracts

critters and it takes a longer time to break down.

PATRICK:
I've found that it's best to keep the pile warm and moist and the best way to do that is to put an insulating layer, and straw is a great insulating layer. And I do want to mention that you notice that we're in the shade, and there's a reason for that. Besides being convenient, and being able to work in the shade, is that the sun beating down here can really dry out your compost pile, kill the critters and render it a long time to turn into compost. So, pick a spot in the shade — you'll be a lot happier about things.

TERRY:
Making your own compost is easy. This pile took us just about an hour to make. It's free and it's the best gift that you can give to your soil so that your garden can grow healthy plants for you and your family.

Thanks Patrick for all your tips and showing us how to do this.

PATRICK:
It's been a pleasure and hope everyone out there has an opportunity to do what we've done and feed your plants the best thing that you can: compost.

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