



## DECEMBER NEWSLETTER ~COMPOSTING~

Patty's Plants Natural & Organic Garden Supply

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### Save Kitchen Scrapes for the Composter

With winter soon upon us, we should be thinking about what we are going to do with all the kitchen scrapes, fall leaves, garden debris. Where are all those potato peels going to go this Holiday season? Down the garage disposal or in the trash bin? Composting is a perfect solution for this. Why is composting so important? To help our environment for one. Composting will reduce the amount of waste we send to landfills. About 30% of what we send to landfills is actually organic or natural material that we could compost at home. Another wonderful reason is for our home gardens. By ap-



plying finished compost as a soil conditioner or topdressing you would be adding nutrients back into the ground for the health of your plants. It naturally fertilizes and builds soil structure. Compost has way more nutrients than peat moss or coconut core. Compost will also help to controls rainwater run-off so it will keep our watershed healthier.

Have a Safe, Happy  
and  
Eco-Friendly  
Holiday Season!  
Patty

### Compost Accelerator

There are products called compost accelerators that will help to keep your compost from getting smelly by breaking it down faster. They usually come as a dry-granular product. The Organica Compost Accelerator is non-toxic with an application rate of one pound per two cubic yards of organic matter.



### What Exactly is Compost?

What exactly is compost? It is a dark, rich, crumbly, earthy smelling mix that consists of mostly decaying organic matter. When it is ready, it should not smell sour or stinky but like fresh wet dirt after a spring rain. For getting started, you will need equal parts of brown matter as well as green. Green matter provides a source of nitrogen, balanced with brown matter would be the



source of carbon, water, and air (oxygen). Green materials are: grass clippings, kitchen scrapes of vegetables or fruits, green weeds, tea and coffee grounds. Brown matter consists of: leaves, straw, dried garden debris, twigs and sticks. When you add green waste you should also add brown. To much green (nitrogen) can become to wet thus blocking the oxygen which will make it decompose slower.

#### Inside this issue:

|   |   |
|---|---|
| Ways of Composting                          | 2 |
| Compost Reading Material                    | 2 |
| The Worm Apartment / Vermiculture           | 3 |
| Why Use Worm Castings?                      | 3 |
| Soil Saver Composter                        | 4 |
| What are Micronutrients and Macronutrients? | 4 |



## Ways of Composting

**Sorry this is a repeat from the November Newsletter but I wanted to devote the entire newsletter to composting.**

### **No Fuss,**

For the busy or lazy gardener, (that's me)

This is the easiest way to compost yard waste. In a heap or in a bin layer chopped yard waste. Leaves, grass, weeds etc. as they accumulate. Water as needed, so the compost stays moist. In 12-18 months the materials at the bottom and center of the pile will be dark and crumbly. Take the top uncomposted material off to start a new pile.

### **Fast Compost**

This is the fastest way to build a "Hot Pile" in a heap or bin. You must turn it frequently to make this work. Layer and mix green materials with dry until you have a good sized pile (3x3x3). Keep the pile moist. Turn the pile at least 2 times a week to give it the air that it needs. This will make it compost faster. It should be ready to use in 2-15 weeks. Add more or less of green or dried materials if it's not heating up properly.

### **Worm Compost**

Worms will turn food and garden waste into rich nutritious fertilizer and soil amendment. I've always bought ready made worm castings and I truly believe in them.

Come in to see my wormtopia in the works. No smell, just good rich worm castings developing. For this type of method, you will need food wastes (no meat or bones) newspapers and red worms and a special worm box or bin. *You can make your own with a little bit of research or purchase a pre-made bin.*

### **Sheet Composting**

Spread leaves or plant residues over the surface of your garden in the fall. Turn the materials into the soil then or wait until spring. I do use this method too.

**Trenching** or dig a large hole. This is the method my Grandmother used. Every day she would send my grandfather out with a bucket of kitchen scrapes again (no bones or meat) to put in a large hole he had dug for her. They covered it with a heavy flat board. In 2-4 months her compost was ready to use.

### **Pre-Made Composters**

If making your own compost pile is to much work right now, how about a pre-made compost bin.

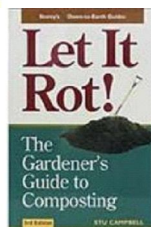
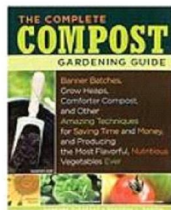
### **Indoor Kitchen Composter**

To carry your kitchen scrapes out to the composter, use this which usually features replaceable charcoal filters that effectively removes odors so the waste can accumulate for literally days indoors, unnoticed.

## Composting Reading Material

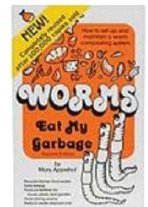
In the **Complete Compost Gardening Guide**, Barbara Pleasant and Deborah L. Martin turn the compost bin upside down with their liberating system of keeping compost heaps right in the garden, rather than in some dark corner behind the garage.

Campbell, Stu. **Let It Rot! The Gardener's Guide To Composting**. Pownal: Storey Books, 1975. This aptly-titled paperback is bound to attract attention. Let It Rot is a 153



page paperback how-to guide to composting. Fun illustrations, helpful suggestions and easy-to-follow instructions make this a good book for all gardeners interested in composting.

**Worms Eat My Garbage** by Mary Appelhof, master vermiculturist better known as "The Worm Woman," wrote this comprehensive how-to on worm composting, including sections on equipment, care, harvesting and worm biology.





## The Worm Apartment ~ Vermiculture ~

Convert kitchen scraps and yard waste into nutrient-rich worm castings in no time with the Sunleaves Wormtopia, a four-tray worm compost system which can accommodate over 15,000 redworms. Worms work in one tray at a time, producing castings as they migrate up to the upper trays. Made from recycled plastic, the Wormtopia also features a handy spigot for the collection of liquid vermicompost. Suited for use indoors or out within 55° and 75°F. Includes vermicomposting instructions, tips, and



worm bedding material. Redworms available separately. Measures 16" x 16" x 24". Come in and see mind in progress!

### LIVE EARTHWORMS

Earthworms eat and burrow twenty-four hours a day! All of this tunneling aerates the soil (getting oxygen to the roots), allows for easier root growth, and improves water retention. They are a natural tie in for cold composting. Earthworms help keep the soil loose. Mother Nature doesn't own a spade! Earthworms consume ordinary soil and cast it back with more nutrients available to plants. These "castings" release their nutrients slowly and do not leach out with watering. Approx. 200 in box.



## Why Use Worm Castings?

*“Earthworm castings are the finest form of humus known. These castings consist of soil and other matter which passes through and mixes with a secretion in their intestinal canal and is of extremely high fertilizer value”.*

J.I. Rodale

( Founder of the Organic Gardening Magazine)

With that said, worm casting are a natural, organic soil builder and fertilizer. It never burns even if you use another fertilizer along with it. (Although you wouldn't really need to.) There isn't any odor. It gives your plants the right amount of micro and macro nutrients. It is not only immediate fertilizer that gets your plants roots off to a good start, but it's also long lasting and your plants will drink it in when they need it later. It's unlike a chemical fertilizer in which the plant drinks it up all at once. Whatever isn't used by your plant is leached out

into the ground or even the ground water. If you go to dig up an area after years of using chemical fertilizers and you don't find any earthworms. They have probably packed their bags and went on to greener pastures. It's always been said, “Feed the soil and the soil will feed your plants”. I know it works and truly believe in it. Worm castings are one of the keys to healthier plants. The ‘Black Gold’ of fertilizer. Worm Castings also help inhibit fungal and bacterial diseases. The healthier your plants the less susceptible they will be to insects and diseases. Isn't that what everyone wants? “Healthy Plants”.



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This **Soilsaver Composter** has a locking lid. It's has many air vent holes in it, helping to avoid problems with the pile smelling, and you can use the holes in the lid for adding water to keep the pile moist and active. The base will help keep critters out of the pile.

It's lightweight (about 30 pounds), as it's made from Polyethylene with 50 percent recycled HDPE plastic content, and comes with a 25 year manufacturers warranty.

It will hold enough material that you can get a hot compost pile going in it. The 2 foot square top opening allows easy loading of plenty of material. (dimensions are about 28" by 28" by 32" tall) The hardware is made from nylon, so it won't rust.

The directions indicate that it should be placed on a level flat surface. This fairly important, as the major complaint seen with this composter is that the lid sometimes doesn't fit properly, and it almost always seems to be the case that the base is not square on the ground.

This composter design has been it production for 25 years. This one is in stock: \$ 69.99 . Comes in box.

The **Rapitest Compost Thermometer** has a large, easily-read dial and a 19" stainless steel probe with a range of 0-220 degrees Fahrenheit, so growers can accurately measure the internal temperature of their pile.



## What are Micronutrients and Macronutrients?

Macronutrients and micronutrients are essential for healthy plant growth. There are 16 proven elements found in plants.

\*The **macronutrients** are nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, calcium, magnesium and sulfur. NPK or nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium are the primary nutrients. They are always listed first in fertilizers because plants use very large amounts of them. They are also used up the fastest in your soil. That's why we need to amend our soil with fertilizers or by adding organic materials to it. Calcium, magnesium and sulfur are called the secondary nutrients. They aren't used as fast so they stay with the plant or in the soil longer. All 6 of these nutrients are the leaf or root cells of a plant.

\***Micronutrients** are essential for the plants growth. They are only needed in small amounts. That's why they are called the "minor elements". The 7 micronutrients are boron, chlorine, copper, iron, manganese, molybdenum and zinc. Micronutrients add more mineral content to the plants. There are also 3 non-mineral nutrients. They are hydrogen, oxygen and carbon. They are found in the process called photosynthesis. They turn into starches and sugars which are the plants food. These are made from when the plants use the energy from the sun. Just like us plants need more than food and water to be healthy, they also need minerals and vitamins to survive.

That's why a good balance of the 16 elements are so im-

portant. We can purchase fertilizers with most of these elements in them, just read the labels.

If you want to make your own organic compost use these materials for a great balance of nutrients.

\*Garden refuse, green leaves/weeds, fruit/vegetable trimmings, manures, and grass clippings are all green nitrogen-rich materials.

\*Untreated sawdust, straw ,chopped prunings, shredded paper, shredded cardboard, paper towels/tissues, pine needles, dry leaves/weeds, coffee grounds/teabags are all carbon rich material.

If you would like to find out exactly what your soil has in it, do a soil test. There are soil test kits available on-line or at your local garden shops. You can also contact your local county extension office and they can tell you how to take a soil sample and send it in to be tested.

The **Rapitest Soil Test kit** is a great value for you .. It comes complete with four individual testing vials: one each for pH, nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium. Color change strips register the reading as surplus, adequate, or depleted of N, P or K while the pH vial gives a targeted reading. \$5.99

