

Quick Composting

Solid Waste Management Fact Sheet No. 6

If you are just starting a garden, feel you need compost right away, and have an available supply of organic material, you may want to consider making quick compost. Compost can be made in as short as 12-14 days. There are three things that are necessary for quick composting:

Chopping or shredding.

It is important to finely chop and shred materials since this increases the surface area of the organic materials, allowing for rapid decomposition.

Blending.

Microorganisms, nitrogen containing activator, and the material to be composted need to be completely blended so there is complete contact between all major ingredients. This can be done by feeding the raw materials together through the chipper/shredder, or mixing them together in a container bag or pile.

Frequent turning.

It is important that the contents of the compost pile be turned every 2 to 3 days to encourage rapid decomposition.

The recipe for quick composting is very similar to that of regular composting. You will need to start with 4 to 5 parts of organic materials to be composted. These can be shredded leaves, grass clippings, or similar types of materials. In addition, you will need about 1 part of garden soil, along with some high nitrogen containing fertilizer materials, such as commercial fertilizer, blood meal, or a similar nitrogen source. Finely pulverize the organic material, and if possible, blend in soil and fertilizer in the shredding process. Shredding can be done with a commercial shredder/chipper or feeding the materials through a bagging type lawn mower and catching the shredded material in the bag.

After blending the material to be composted, the pile should be completely moistened and placed in a container or pile with the surface protected to prevent excessive drying. This can be done by loosely covering the pile with a piece of plastic, or lining a bin or container with a plastic liner. Be careful that the

container is not completely or tightly sealed since oxygen needs to be available to the decomposing organisms in order to prevent anaerobic fermentation, resulting in slower decomposition and off odors.

Using a spading fork or similar implement, turn or agitate the compost every 2 to 3 days. You should notice an immediate heating process that the compost will undergo to the center part of the container. This heating process should continue for the first 10 to 12 days of the composting process. If you notice off aroma developing from the compost pile, open it up, allow it to aerate, and agitate to introduce oxygen to the pile. Replace water as necessary to keep compost moist, but not completely saturated or excessively wet.

After 12 to 14 days, you should notice that the temperature of the pile will decrease, the volume of the pile has been reduced to approximately one-half, and the quick composting process is essentially finished. There will be some continuation of other composting processes gradually over time, however the compost at this point can be safely used as a garden additive or mulch.

The speed of decomposition of quick compost depends upon the fineness of the shredding of materials, as well as the frequency of turning. If you have difficulty in getting this process to work quickly, try to find some method of shredding the material finer and/or encourage more complete blending of the organic material soil and nitrogen activator.

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EP-6

May 1995

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