

BELL COUNTY MASTER GARDENER

Tip of the Week

By: Ursula Nanna

“Composting! Treasure at Our Feet”

Walk on them every day in the fall, hear the crunches, rake them up, but don't discard the nondescript grass and leaves. Separately they are wonderful, but together they are dynamite-- nature's food called compost. This season we have them both at once. Composting is Mother Nature's way recycling organic waste into useable nutrition for lawn, garden, trees, shrubs, and refreshing container plants. If you are not already composting, now is the right season to begin.

Composting is easy, returns organic matter to the soil, helps loosen clay soil so roots grow better, makes the soil easier to work, and adds to the water and essential nutrient retention capabilities of the sandy soil. It also keeps over 15 million tons of organic waste from the landfills. So don't bag it!

Everything, including grass clippings, weeds, disease-free plant waste, kitchen scraps of vegetables and fruits, eggshells, coffee and tea bags, and filters, is compostable. Don't use meat fats, cooking oils, or weed materials because they can attract unwanted pests and will add to future weeding.

To make compost piles, choose a sunny, level site convenient to the house and yard. No need to even have a special bin! Collect the leaves and grass from your yard and the already bagged material from neighbors. There's no set rule except to have some carbon leaves and nitrogen grass and layer them also adding house waste at will. Keep the pile moist, not wet, and allow a few weeks for the composting to begin. A hot pile is turned over each month using a pitchfork, while a cold pile is added to on top and compost is removed from the bottom of the pile as available without turning.

I take bagged leaves/grass and mow over them a time or two, rake them up and add to the pile or directly to the garden plot and let composting take place there for less work. Then I don't have to turn the pile or rake and I've composted and mulched in one step...efficient, huh?

When finished, compost smells earthy and sweet, breaks up easily in the hands and is rich and dark. Start now and by spring you can add your compost to your gardens and in weeks will see the plants improve. Keep the pile churning and growing and your yard rich and beautiful.

Have any questions about gardening in Central Texas? Contact

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