

Composting 101

A Gardener's Gumbo



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Thanksgiving Point
2007

Why Compost?

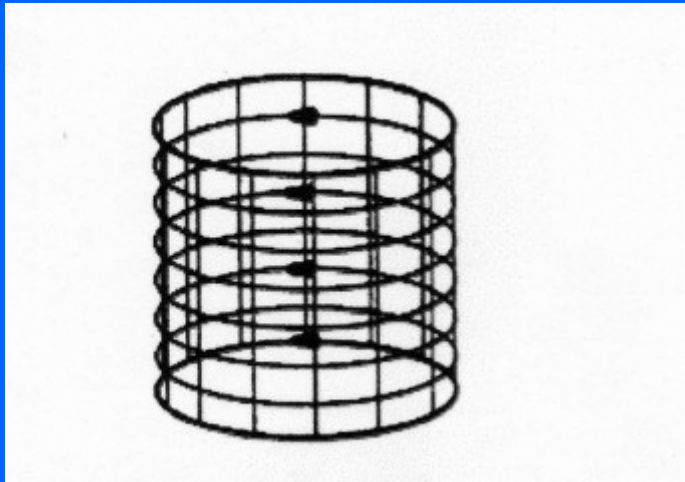
- Environmentally friendly
 - Not filling up landfills with green and brown waste
- Economical
 - Free amendments for your soil
- Compost is REALLY good for your garden
 - Robert Rodale coined the phrase “black gold”

Site Selection

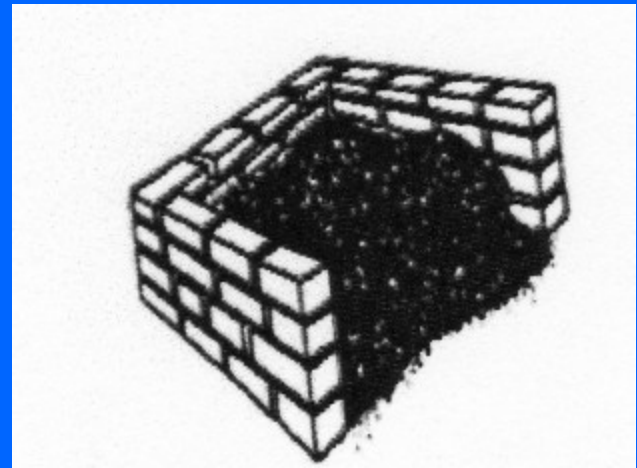
- Sunny location in an open area
- Better with soil underneath if using open bins
- Within reach of a water source (hose)
- Close to basic garden area – you don't want to haul materials a long distance

Choosing Containers or Bins

- Make your own bin



Woven Wire Bin

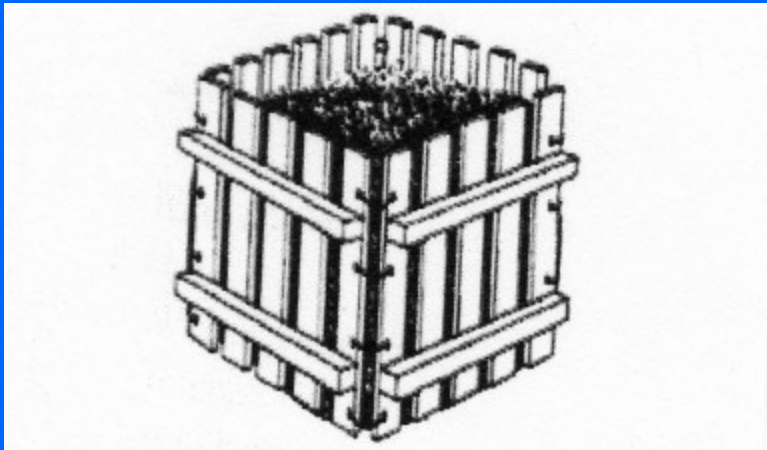


Cinder Block Bin

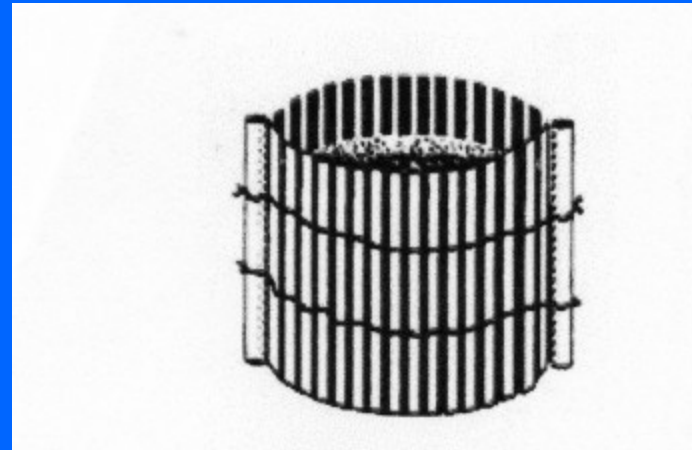
Choosing Containers or Bins

Bins

- Make your own bin



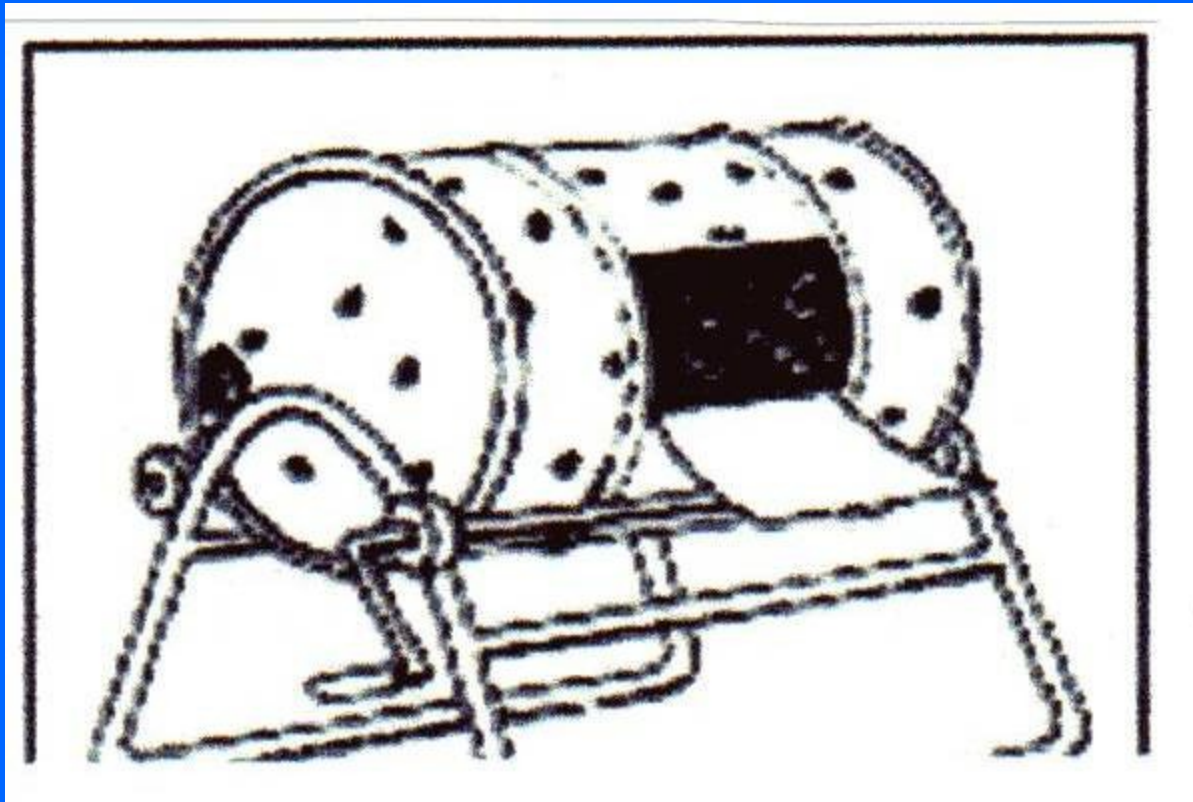
Wooden Pallet Bin



Snow Fence Bin

Choosing Containers or Bins

- Purchased Bins



Choosing Containers or Bins

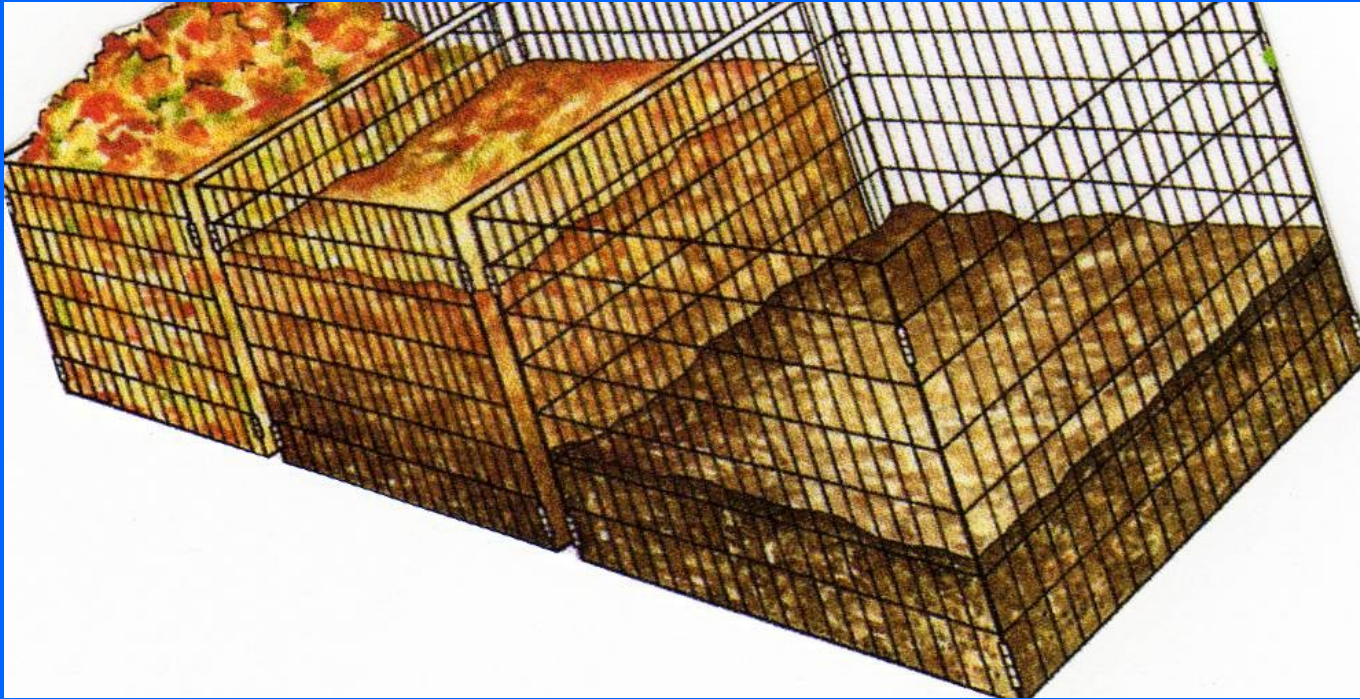
- Purchased Bins



Heavy Duty Plastic or PVC

Choosing Containers or Bins

- Purchased Bins



Wire Bins

How to Compost

- There are as many systems as there are people in the world.
 1. Pile up waste in the corner of the back yard.
 2. Material spread over the garden in the fall and tilled in.
 3. Use purchased or homemade bins.

How Long Will it Take?

- Longer than two weeks!
- Probably four weeks to a year
- Depending on:
 - how warm the weather
 - how often you turn it
 - how damp you keep it
 - what you put in it

This is my setup . . .

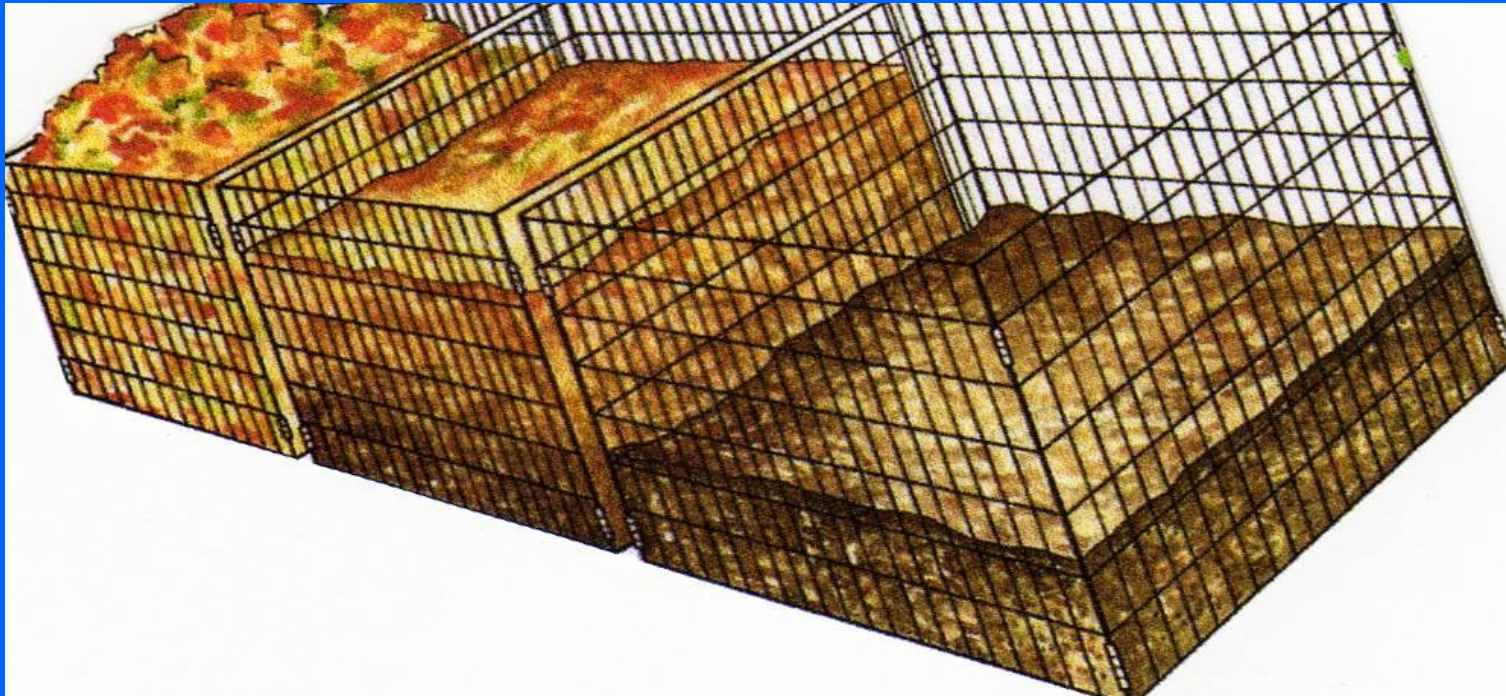
- Three wire bins – 3' square



- Lined around the sides with weed barrier – 4' wide x 14 ft. long

This one didn't work because . . .

- * It dried out too fast. Hard to keep damp.
- * The material kept sifting out of the sides (especially when it started breaking down).



This is what I do . . .

Starting the first bin:

Line the bottom with a layer of straw or chopped up corn stalks or small sticks.

This leaves air pockets at the bottom.



Then start adding greens and browns.

–
(No matter what system you use, the process remains
the same

Greens: (anything green or “wet”)

- Chop up everything – It breaks down faster!
- ANYTHING ORGANIC
- Spent flower trimmings (deadheading or cutting back)
- Some grass clippings
- Weeds with some dirt attached to roots
 - Cut off seed heads! This method does not get hot enough to kill weed seeds!!
- Kitchen scraps

- Banana Peels
- Spoiled Vegetables & Fruit (oogy is good!)
- Vegetable Peelings
- Egg Shells
- Fruit & Vegetable Rinds
- Hard or Stale Bread (moldy is good!)
- Peelings from canning (avoid large pits)



Browns – Anything brown or “dry”

- Paper Plates
- Paper Napkins
- Paper Towels
- Remember to tear or shred
- Cardboard egg cartons
- Any paper from your shredder
- Shredded wet newspaper
- Fall Leaves



Every once in a while add . . .

- Some grass clippings (about twice through the year)
- Composted (not fresh!) animal manure if you can get it.
- Saved leaves raked up last fall.

Saving Fall leaves:

If you have leaves left over after filling your bin in the fall, save them through the winter in bins or plastic bags.

Add them to the process next season.



Remember! You must have greens and browns.

Every so often

■ ■ ■
Add a few shovels full of dirt from dug up sod or old potting soil from last year's pots.

You should have about 2-3" of soil for every 12 " of green and brown.



About once a week or

SO . . .

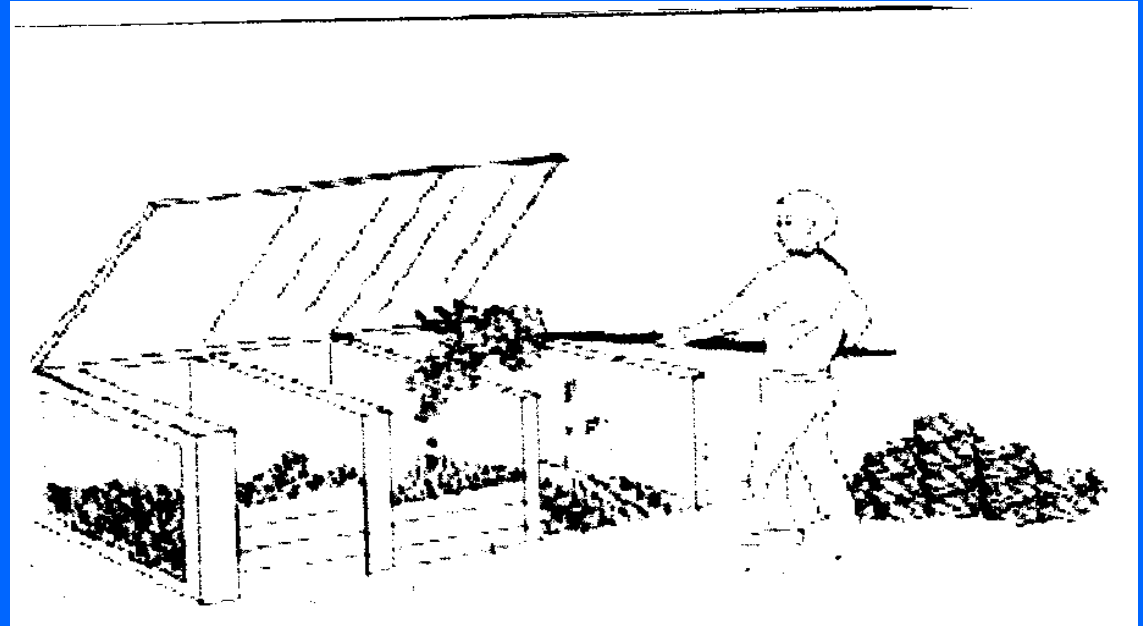
- Depending on the weather and how ambitious you are . . .
 - Sprinkle with a hose.
 - In the summer months it tends to dry out faster than in the spring and fall when it's a little cooler.
 - Think consistency of a wrung out sponge.

When your pile gets about 12" deep . . .

- Start tossing it
 - The key to a successful compost system is
 - (1) oxygen and
 - (2) moisture
 - Your pile needs both to break down properly.
 - Start turning it over with a pitchfork, pulling the middle of the pile to the outside and the outsides toward the middle.

When your first bin is full

- ■ ■ ■
Move the contents of Bin #1 into Bin #2.
Water well and cover.
- Start filling Bin #1 again.
- Using this same process, fill and move compost to each successive bin.
- Keep up the process of turning and watering each bin about once a week.



- As the pile continues to break down, it will get smaller and smaller in volume.
- The finished compost will be in Bin #3.

Whew! I told you it was labor intensive!!

Empty Bin #3 . . .

- Believe it or not, all that shredded paper, veggie scraps and clippings will end up looking like nice loamy soil! You'll be able to tell when it's ready!



• Storing Finished Compost

- When the compost is ready, I empty it into a large rolling garbage can pushing it through a wire mesh screen. By screening it, you'll get rid of all the junk -- rocks, roots, sticks, etc., -- and break up the bigger clumps.



A Few Cautions . . .

Do not put in . . .

- Animal products – meat, bones, cheese, milk products.
- Dog or cat feces.
- Weeds with seeds attached.
- Small sticks will compost but it takes a long time – same with pits and pine cones.

Repeat – chop everything fine. It only takes a minute and it composts much faster!

Suggestions:

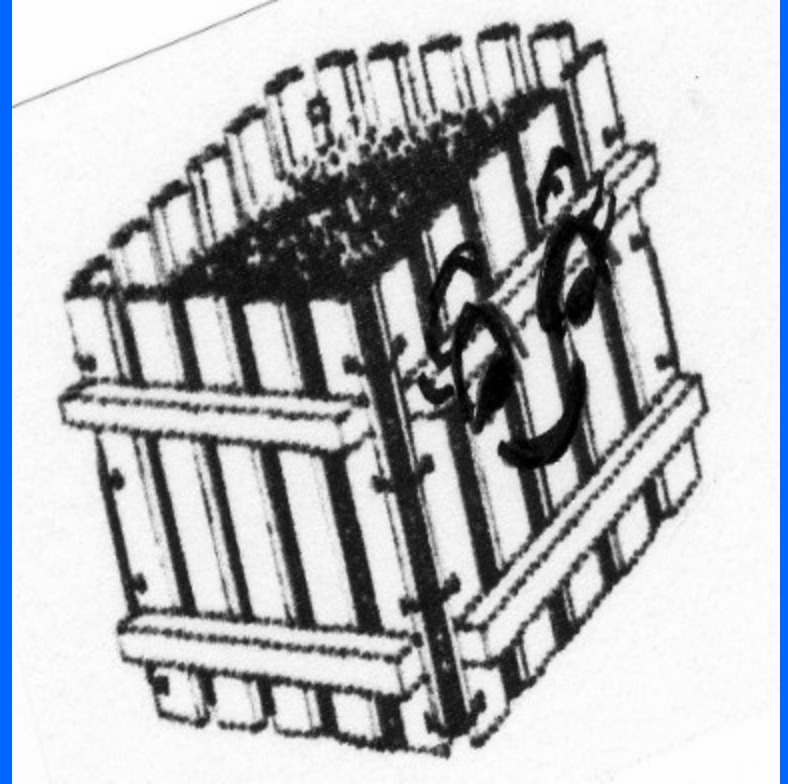
- You can add compost starter or a few handfuls of bone meal. Don't add lime – it makes the mix break down too fast and it gets slimy and smelly.
- Don't get hung up on formulas. If you follow the plan, everything will break down and you'll get a nice loamy mix.
- The pile must be tossed to aerate, and watered to keep damp. Otherwise it mats down. Forget “layering.”
- Don't worry about white mold that develops on the mix. **THAT'S GOOD!** It's breaking down.

- Don't worry about little "critters"! Worms, millipedes, and pill bugs (potato bugs or "roly polys") -- They're helping the process along.
- Be sure your pile is covered. An open container will dry out faster and it invites big critters
Little critters=Good The neighbors cat=Not Good!
- The pile should not smell. If it does, it's too wet. Add some browns and dirt and leave uncovered to dry for a few days.
- You can't compost with grass clippings only! You know what it smells like when you store fresh clippings in a plastic bag. That's what happens in your compost bin only worse!! If you add clippings to your pile, dry them out first or add just a few and stir them into the pile with a few shovelfuls of dirt.

A Word About Vermiculture (Worm Bins)



Good Luck
and
Happy
Composting
!!



Resources

- Building a Compost Bin
 - University of Missouri Extension – <http://muextension.missouri.edu>
 - Ohio State University Extension – <http://ohioline.osu.edu>

- Compost Bins and Equipment
 - A M Leonard Co – www.gardenersedge.com
 - Gardener's Supply Company – www.gardeners.com

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