

ABCs of Composting; Savings for You and the City

Feed a billion microbes and save the City and yourself some money by composting.

Composting requires as much or as little effort as one wishes to exert. It is great for gardens, and it costs nothing. All one needs is air, water and food (vegetable and fruit scraps, egg shells, coffee grounds, most garden and lawn trimmings and even some wood, to name just a few things).

Microbes (fungi, bacteria, etc.) actually make the compost. They digest yard and kitchen wastes. If the compost pile is cool enough, earthworms and insects will help the process along. Eventually, the pile breaks down into nitrogen-rich soil, good for gardening or potting.

One can just jump into composting or consult a variety of organic gardening books in the library or visit the numerous composting web sites.

The advantage to the City and taxpaying residents is that every pound of compost represents another pound diverted from the dumps, helping the City meet state-mandated recycling goals.

While there are some suggested "how to" guidelines for composting, one can either build or purchase a

Composting Classes

A number of free composting workshops are still available through Oct. 21 at a variety of locations in East Contra Costa.

The address for each site will be determined by the size of each session's enrollment.

For classes in Antioch, call (925) 779-7097; Pittsburg, (925) 252-4114; at county-sponsored sites, (925) 335-1224.

- Antioch's are 9-11 a.m. Sept. 16 and 7-9 p.m. Oct. 4.
- Pittsburg's are 7-9 p.m. Sept. 20 and 9-11 a.m. Oct. 21.
- The county's is 7-9 p.m. Sept. 13 in Oakley.

composting stacker or make a pile out in the open, although the latter might attract raccoons and other pests.

Organic gardeners tend to divide compost materials into two categories: "brown" or dry and "green" or wet.

"Brown" includes dry leaves, straw, wood chips and sawdust (from untreated wood). These provide energy for microbes. Moisten dry material before adding them to a compost pile.

Lawn trimmings, vegetable and fruit scraps, coffee grounds, tea bags and the like make up "greens." Greens have a higher nitrogen content.

Mix browns and greens for a balance of wet and dry and to provide aeration.

The microbes you've invited to dine on leftovers (minus meat, bones, bread and dairy products) need air. Without it, their anaerobic cousins take over and cause the pile to decompose more slowly and to reek of rotting garbage.

The secret to avoiding this is to keep air passages open by occasionally turning the pile and breaking it up with a pitchfork. Alternating layers of dry or brown material with wet or green material helps. Even then, mixing with the pitchfork is still recommended.

Some organic gardeners advise keeping the pile as moist as a lightly squeezed washcloth. This ensures a consistent rate of decomposition, but avoid wetting so much that the ingredients mat up and smother the compost materials.

For more information about composting consult the Brentwood Library at (925) 634-4101 or Contra Costa County main library in Pleasant Hill at (925) 646-6434 for a video entitled "Turning Your Spoils to Soil."

O'Hara Extension to Ease Traffic Jams

(O'HARA AVENUE, from Page 2)

Work on the project, which is expected to be complete by the end of 2006, began July 1.

Not only will the extension improve circulation between Brentwood and Oakley, it will be a big relief to residents who have children enrolled in Marsh Creek Elementary School at 601 Grant St., Bornstein says. Those residents currently have to take a roundabout route that adds time and distance to their trip just to take their children to the school.

RECYCLING & WASTE COLLECTION DO'S & DON'TS

Do's...

- Fill color-coded carts correctly: brown for garbage, blue for recyclables, green for yard waste.
- Call 5 days in advance of your regular pickup day if you have extra garbage, extra recyclables or extra yard waste.
- Leave carts out the night before your scheduled pickup day. Drivers often arrive early.
- Place carts in the street with wheels against the curb and keep lids closed.
- Leave 3 feet of space between carts.
- Keep carts at least 6 feet away from obstructions including mailboxes, parked cars and portable basketball hoops.
- Call (925) 516-6090 with questions.

Don'ts...

- Do not mix regular garbage with recyclable material or yard waste.
- Do not overfill carts. Open lids will cause spillage and attract animals.
- Do not place toxics such as paint, anti-freeze, motor oil, car batteries or pesticides in any cart. Call Delta Diablo Sanitary at (925) 756-1990 to recycle batteries, oil and latex paint and for safe disposal of hazardous wastes.
- Do not mix animal wastes or inorganic materials like concrete, rocks, plastic bags, glass or metal with yard wastes.
- Do not place ceramics, windows, drinking glasses and fluorescent and incandescent light bulbs in the recycling cart.