



The DIRT Society

Why Should You Compost?

Composting isn't difficult. Composting isn't gross. Composting isn't messy, smelly, labor-intensive or relegated to rural farms. On the contrary; **composting is the natural process that occurs when plant matter is left alone.** It's simple, clean, efficient, labor-saving, rewarding and, whether you see it or not, composting is happening everywhere you go.

To compost is to exercise a small measure of control over a universal biological cycle; that of decomposition. When organic matter dies, it decomposes. The physical mass of the body reduces in particle size, thanks to the help of microorganisms, worms, moisture, and innumerable chemical and physical reactions. The material which previously made up the body of an object becomes dissociated from the whole. That isn't to say that the resulting pile of compost has lost nutrient value; it hasn't. In fact, most of the valuable compounds had been trapped. As compost, these nutrients are free to be absorbed.

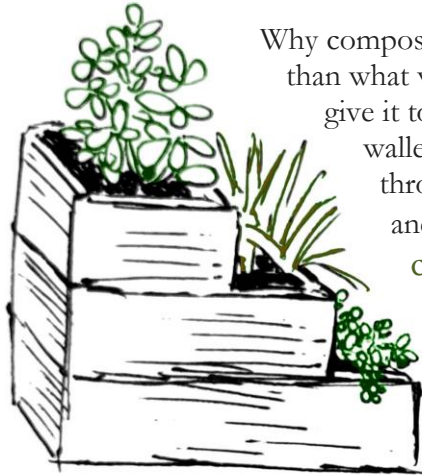
In short, compost is ready-to-use food for your garden. To every sort of horticulturalist that exists, quality compost is precious stuff.



Imagine that you have a bag of seeds which you empty onto a table. Each individual seed is a particle. These get mixed up, stuck together, moved from one place on your table to another, and then shuffled around again. When some of them combine, they make valuable vitamins. Some are fiber. Others group together to make protein, nitrogen, water, phosphorous, etc. But there is always the same quantity of particles (seeds). If you arrange your seeds to look like a carrot; roots, stems, leaves; you've done what nature does; create organisms with some basic starting material. If you feed the fleshy part of your carrot to a pile of seeds elsewhere on the table (maybe it was a rabbit,) you haven't added any seeds, and you haven't taken any away. There is still the same number of seeds. Now sweep up the seeds left over from your eaten carrot, and combine them with the seeds that made up your rabbit. Every seed has stayed on the table, regardless of what it once was.

When we compost, we don't typically compost the consumers. (We are the consumers, usually.) Though, in the grand scheme of things, our particles will continue to build other compounds and organisms. When we build our own garden compost, we use everything from kitchen scraps to lawn clippings; all the little seeds we can spare after eating the carrot. These we combine in a designated area that will allow us a measure of control. **We regulate the temperature and moisture content somewhat, wait patiently, and then reap the rewards. Rich, nutrient-laden soil now exists where once there was a box of old lettuce, egg shells and newspaper.** The nutrients have been salvaged from waste and put back into food. The cycle can continue indefinitely, because there will always be the same number of seeds on the imaginary table.

If turning garbage into gold sounds like a perfect system, it's for a good reason. Why throw away apple cores, carryout boxes, toilet paper rolls, corn husks, and coffee grounds when you can mix them together and create compost? Why waste all of those nutrients in a landfill when you could feed them right back to nature, or use them to grow your own flowers, fruits and vegetables? In a plastic bag, treated with chemicals, contained, buried and exiled; nutrients are lost to us for generations. As compost, all of that otherwise lost material continues to cycle and replenish our immediate environs.



Why compost? The answer is simple. Even if we don't need any more money than what we have, do we throw cash away? No. We could spend it, save it, give it to someone in need... but very rarely (if ever) do we spend our wallets over a trashcan. And yet, that's what we're doing every time we throw a banana peel away; we're disposing of environmental currency and robbing ourselves and others of its value. **To contribute to composting is to reallocate this currency until it reaches someone who can use it.**

If you have a garden, regardless of its size, you can benefit from compost directly. If you don't grow anything, you can export your wealth; investing it in a farm or garden offsite. There are numerous organizations, farmers and hobby gardeners who would love to pick up your compostable goods. Your only responsibility is to know what should be saved, and to keep it contained until collection.

To answer the question “Why compost?” is an easy enough task. To answer the question “How can I start composting?” is just as delightfully simple. **For more information on how to reduce your waste and integrate an element of composting, read The DIRT Society's five-step introduction here. For a detailed description of some of the many ways you can begin composting, check out our mini-manual here.**