

Recycling Yard Waste to Compost

Fall is coming, and, it won't be long before the leaves turn golden, red and brown, and fall to the ground. In the natural world, the leaves stay on the ground, slowly decomposing and returning their carbon (organic matter) to the soil. But in the modern world of manicured lawns, leaves must be removed, so out come the bagger mowers, leaf blowers, rakes and large yellow plastic, or paper bags, and millions of pounds of leaves leave our neighborhoods for landfills, or municipal compost operations. Rather than sending leaves to the dump, they can be composted in the backyard, turning them back into the natural organic matter that is so good for our soils and gardens.

Composting of leaves can be done quickly by adding nitrogen, moistening the pile and turning it regularly to speed up the process of decomposition, or it can be allowed to proceed more slowly by forming a static pile which is largely left alone. In either case, compost bins are required to hold the decomposing leaves. A good size bin can be made by forming a circle from a 12 foot length of 3-foot-wide welded wire (2" x 4") fence from the hardware store.

For fast composting, build the compost heap; add 3 to 6" of leaves to the bin, and then add 3 to 6" of grass clippings or garden plants and a couple of shovels of rich garden soil, and moisten. Repeat the process twice more till the bin is full. After a week to 10 days, the pile can be turned by removing the cage from the pile, setting it adjacent to the pile, and shoveling the now hot compost back into the bin. At this time, ensure that the pile is about as moist as a squeezed sponge. Turn again in 4 to 6 weeks if the weather permits, or as you go into the spring, when it should be ready for use in the garden.

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