Making Nutrient-Rich Soil

By Amy Snyder

Compost heaps work by generating intense heat and biological activity to break down organic material into a rich soil amendment. To expedite this naturally occurring decomposition process, follow the steps below.

1. Create a compost area. This can be a remote corner of your grounds or a self-made bin. (For more information on composters and composting supplies, call the American Horticultural Society at 1-800-777-7931.)

2. Gather organic material; add in formula. The three-layer formula consists of leaves and grass clippings (this layer approximately four to six inches deep), one inch of soil, and a handful of nitrogen fertilizer. Repeat layers to a three-foot level until the compost bin or area is filled. (Other plant debris and even kitchen waste can also be added to speed up decomposition, but should be shredded into pieces no larger than three-quarters of an inch.)

3. Add water and stir. The pile should be kept moist (much like a wrung-out sponge) and should be turned weekly to add oxygen.

The heat in the center of a compost pile can reach 150-200 degrees as microorganisms break down matter. After three to six months, the heap will become dark and crumbly, signaling that it is ready for use.

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