

6 simple secrets to successful composting

No matter your gardening prowess, composting should be an integral part of a home lawn and garden care program.

BY ALLEN ROBINSON





BILL SEVER

No matter your gardening prowess, composting should be an integral part of a home lawn and garden care program.

- It can save up to one-third of the space in local landfills.
- It enriches the soil, slowly releasing nutrients as plants need them.
- It adds enzymes and microorganisms, improving plant health and suppressing plant diseases and pests.
- It improves water and nutrient retention.
- It encourages proper drainage.
- It attracts worms, whose tunnels provide passages for oxygen, water and plant roots. And the worm work reduces the need for chemical fertilizers.



Compost bin with built-in turning component // Bill Sever

The six key secrets to successful composting include:

1. Microorganisms

Bacteria naturally found in the soil and compost contain the primary microorganisms that break down the organic matter. Bacteria found in compost starter kits also can help.

2. Moisture

Proper moisture is important to keep those microorganisms alive. Keep the pile moist (like a wrung-out sponge) but not wet, as this excludes oxygen.

3. Aeration

Microorganisms need oxygen to break down the organic debris. Regular turning of the compost pile is not mandatory, but it does provide for proper aeration and speeds up the decomposition process.

4. Volume

A 3-foot by 3-foot pile is the minimum amount of volume necessary to create heat and to hold adequate temperature. Piles larger than 5-feet by 5-feet cannot be aerated properly.

5. Surface area

Smaller particle size increases the surface area for microorganisms to work. Chopping and/or shredding reduces the overall particle size.

6. Carbon/nitrogen ratio

Scientists have determined that approximately 25-30 parts carbon to one-part nitrogen is a healthy ratio. A high-carbon-content pile will be very slow to decompose; a high-nitrogen content pile will release excess smelly ammonia gas. Leaves and straw are good carbon makers; grass clippings and kitchen scraps are good nitrogen makers.

A no-no: Never add fats, oils, protein scraps, dairy products, animal or human manure, colored newspaper, plastic materials, coal or charcoal ashes, or diseased plants to the pile. A good rule of thumb: "When in doubt, throw it out."

Proper layering is helpful in aiding the overall decomposition process. The first layer should be of larger stalk-like materials (corn stalks, small twigs, etc.) to produce proper aeration at the bottom.

The next layer should be 3-6 inches thick of dried organic matter or leaves (carbon matter).

The third layer should be a thinner layer of kitchen vegetable scraps, grass clippings and/or garden plant materials (nitrogen matter).

The fourth and final layer should be about 1 inch of soil to add microbes. Once this is in place, give the pile a good sprinkle of water to get the process going.

Thank you to Tulsa County Master Gardeners for their expertise in this subject matter. Allen Robinson has been a Master Gardener since 2010.

Lunch and learn with the Master Gardeners

April 2: Tomatoes in Oklahoma

April 9: Fruit trees in Oklahoma

April 16: Pollinator gardens

April 23: Seed saving and heirloom seeds

April 30: Composting 101

Bring your lunch. Free admission. 12:10-12:50 p.m. at Central Library, 400 Civic Center. Visit tulsamastergardeners.org for more information.

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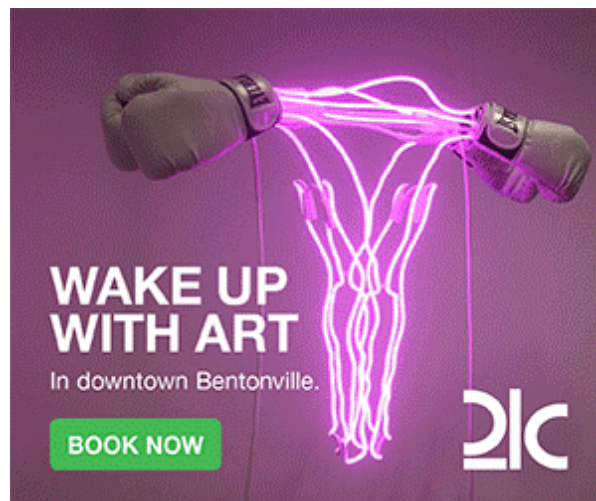
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10:00 AM - 5:00 PM	American Indian Artists: 20th Century Masters	▼
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Judy Langdon

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Judy Langdon and Natalie Mikles

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