

## *May 6 – 12, 2012 is International Compost Awareness Week*

This year's theme is '**Give Back to the Earth**'.

Compost is made by allowing organic material such as food scraps and garden waste to decompose with lots of air moving around them. It's a natural process that's been going on for millions of years.

Every year we throw away millions of tons of organic waste, much of this finds its way into landfill sites where it decomposes and gives off gasses that pollute the environment and cause global warming. You can save this waste, save money, save the planet and have fun.

If you put all your organic waste in a pile and keep it open so that air can move through it you will make compost. You can use this compost to grow more vegetables, flowers or pot plants. You are getting something for nothing. If you have enough compost you can dig it in to your garden allotment, window box or plant pots. Finished compost can be applied to the soil in many ways, such as a soil amendment mixed into the soil) or as a topdressing or mulch spread on top of the soil.

Healthy soil is alive, teeming with microorganisms such as bacteria, fungi and yeast as well as larger creatures like earthworms. They depend on the availability of air, water and nutrients in the soil to live. In return, they are the ultimate recyclers, breaking down organic matter to release nutrients for root development and plant growth. They also mix up the soil to improve aeration, texture and structure. Celebrate when you find earthworms in your soil. It's a sign that it's a good place to live and flourish.



### *Recipes for Composting*

#### **Shopping List**

- Green yard waste: vegetables and fruit scraps, grass clippings and weeds
- Brown yard waste: leaves, small brush and twigs



#### **Lazy Person's Compost**

**Ingredients:** green & brown yard waste, water as needed

**Directions:**

- In a heap, layer your yard waste as it accumulates. For faster composting, chip it up first.
- Water so compost is kept as moist as a wrung-out sponge.
- In a year to 18 months, the material at the bottom and center of the pile will be dark, crumbly compost. Sift, and use the uncomposted material to start a new batch.

#### **Fast Compost**

**Ingredients:** green & brown yard waste, water as needed

**Directions:**

- Mix one part green yard waste with two parts brown to form a pile (an average size is 4' x 4' x 4'). For fast composting, chop it up first with a hoe or lawn mower.
- Mix in one inch of soil.
- Keep the pile as moist as a wrung-out sponge.
- Turn the pile every week to let air in.
- Finished compost will take between 4 weeks and 1 year, depending on how often you turn it and how well you maintain the moisture of the pile.

## *Find alternatives to burning*



People conducting spring cleanups who are thinking about taking a match to a debris pile may want to think twice, according to state environmental officials, who caution that burning household trash adds dangerous pollutants to the air. And while burning some yard waste is legal in some areas, state forestry officials caution that

debris burning is the number one cause of wildfires in Wisconsin, causing approximately 30 percent of such fires each year.

“Burning any material, whether plastic, paper or wood, produces a variety of hazardous and toxic air pollutants, including carcinogens such as arsenic, benzene and formaldehyde,” said Brad Wolbert, of the Department of Natural Resources Waste and Materials Management Program. “Children and others with asthma are especially harmed by smoke from burning garbage. If you burn trash, you’re affecting your health and the environment more than you know.”

**Because of its environmental risk, burning trash in Wisconsin is illegal. In addition, Wisconsin's recycling law and local ordinances prohibit burning or disposing of recyclable materials in landfills.**

“Recycling programs are available in every community for plastic, glass and metal containers, corrugated cardboard, newspaper, and magazines,” Wolbert said. Agricultural and horticultural plastics like silage film, haylage bags, bale wrap, woven tarps, nursery pots, and trays must also be recycled or landfilled. It is illegal to burn plastics in Wisconsin. Materials that are not recyclable should go to a legal disposal facility, not a burn barrel or pile.

Materials that are legal to burn, such as leaves and brush, are also regulated under state codes. [Burning permits](#), issued by the DNR, are required for debris burns. Burning permits are designed so that people may burn brush only in areas where and at times when the risk of wildfire is low. Burning permits only authorize the burning of legal materials. Instead of burning, state environmental and forestry officials recommend people visit the DNR website and search keywords "[open burning](#)" for alternative such as composting and recycling.

Current law requires individuals wishing to burn legal materials to first obtain a burning permit and then call or [check online](#) on the day of the burn for the daily restrictions. [Permits can be obtained online](#) or calling 1-888-WIS-BURN from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. daily. Customers may also visit their local Ranger Station or Emergency Fire Warden for permits in-person. Permits are free and valid for one year. For more information on burning permits and the current fire danger in Wisconsin, see the DNR website.

For more information on how to handle waste materials, visit [dnr.wi.gov](http://dnr.wi.gov) and search keyword "[waste](#)." For information on recycling of agricultural pesticide containers see Container Services Network LLC at [www.containerservicesnetwork.com](http://www.containerservicesnetwork.com).

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