

We're Here to Help!

Why is it important to add organic matter to your garden? One reason is because 80% of all plant problems begin with poor soil conditions. Adding organic matter to your soil can help correct many of these ills.

This brochure offers basic information to get your compost pile started. If you are unsure about the process, we are happy to help answer your gardening questions.

For your convenience, Phelan Gardens is open seven days a week.



Open Year-Round
7 days a week

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Guide to Home Composting

How to turn garden and kitchen waste into black gold



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Composting 101

Most successful gardeners will tell you that good “soil” is a prerequisite to a productive garden. While rich dark dirt can be purchased in a bag, it can also be created by composting organic matter from your yard, decreasing yard waste by as much as 50%! Rather than sending your grass clippings, yard refuse, and kitchen waste to the landfill, consider creating a compost pile.

As these items naturally decompose, they form a rich soil-like substance called compost or humus. When added to the soil, this recycled matter will improve soil structure and water retention. While compost vastly improves the tilth of your soil, it is not a replacement for fertilizer.

HOW TO START A PILE

- Select a site protected from wind (to avoid drying out the outside of the pile)

- Choose a site that receives some sun but is out of direct afternoon sunlight
- Size is important—at least 3x3x3 is necessary to build heat in the center of your pile for decomposition to occur. Compost should feel warm to the touch except in winter months.
- Simply start your pile on the ground, or construct a bin from materials such as chicken wire, snow fencing, or pallets.
- Layer your pile with **GREENS** (nitrogen) such as grass clippings, garden prunings, non-meat/non-dairy kitchen scraps AND **BROWNS** (carbons) such as dead leaves from trees or plants.
Note: If you are starting a brand new pile, you might want to begin in Autumn since there are more browns available during that time of year
- The ratio should be 3 parts brown to every 1 part green.
- Add water between layers. After that, add moisture as needed when you turn your pile. Your pile should be kept moist, **but never soggy.**

- Turn your pile with a pitchfork about once a month. This ensures oxygen gets to the center of the pile to aid in decomposition and avoid a bad odor.
- **NEVER COMPOST CARNIVORE FECAL MATTER, MEAT OR DAIRY SCRAPS OR DISEASED PLANT MATERIAL**

If you plan to use your compost on a vegetable garden, you won't want to use grass clippings that have had chemicals such as weed killers applied to them.

A well maintained pile can be ready in as little as 2 months during the summer. Finished compost will have an earthy smell to it and you won't recognize the material in its original form.

Use compost to:

- Top dress garden beds each spring
- Incorporate into new plantings
- Till into vegetable garden