

Secrets of the Thrifty Gardener—Compost Revealed

The Thrifty Gardener loves to save money. Every dollar saved can be used to buy more plants, especially those on the triage table at the nursery. You know them . . . the ones marked down 50%, maybe even 75% . . . the ones that the staff and normal shoppers have given up hope for. But the Thrifty Gardener knows better. He has a secret. He knows what will bring many of those struggling babies back to their former glory, a bit of pampering and a healthy dose of . . . COMPOST.

Thrifty knows that compost loosens his clay soil, improving soil texture and tilth, as well as drainage so plant roots can grow stronger. It enriches the soil, improving overall plant health which, in turn, helps to suppress plant diseases and pests. It adds nutrients to his soil and helps the soil retain those nutrients, releasing them slowly as his plants need them. It contains beneficial bacteria, fungi and microscopic organisms that most people don't even think of . . . organisms that release chemicals that can control certain plant diseases. It attracts worms, those decomposers whose tunnels provide passages for oxygen and water and plant roots. And, it actually reduces the need for chemical fertilizers.

So, Thrifty saves money by reducing purchases of chemical fertilizers and soil conditioners. He reduces pesticide purchases and their use. Best of all, his plants grow better and are healthier overall. And, he has more money to buy more plants. Thrifty Gardener is a happy gardener.

Being Thrifty means he doesn't purchase bags of compost at the nursery. He easily makes his own, from things he would normally throw away. So, in essence, it's FREE!

In containers under the kitchen sink, he collects apple cores, banana peels, avocado pits, coffee grounds and filters, potato and cucumber peelings, eggshells, celery cores and broccoli stems. All manner of organic waste that he used to throw in the trash now goes into the composter along with fall leaves (which provides the needed carbon), some grass clippings (which provides the needed nitrogen), and the stalks of decorative grasses and other garden trimmings he cuts back throughout the year.

Thrifty knows that the greater the variety of materials used in making compost, the greater the variety of nutrients in the finished product.

What he doesn't ever add to his composter are meats, bones, cheeses and any other dairy products, pet wastes, fats and oils and never yard trimmings treated with chemical pesticides since that would kill beneficial composting microorganisms.

Thrifty also knows composting can be as simple or as complex as a gardener wants.



Pre-made composter

His friend, the Lazy Composter, loves compost but hates the thought of all the time and work spent turning the pile every few days, especially in the heat of the summer. Lazy has purchased and put together a pre-made composter. Every so often he takes collected kitchen waste to his composter, opens the lid and dumps it in. He keeps adding material through the top and scoops finished compost through the lift-up door at the bottom of the unit, all the time smiling at how easy composting can be. Happy Lazy Composter!

Composter, enjoys carefully tending to lavish all her compost. She two bin composter wire panels. As she autumn leaves and kitchen waste, she fork and twists it to oxygen to the lower the composting fresh kitchen scraps under existing layers to keep out the squirrels and other varmints. When one bin is full, she begins the second bin. She adds water during dry spells and adds dry material after the rains. Avid Composter has more compost and gets it much faster than the Lazy Composter.



Two-bin wire composter

Another friend, Avid being outside her plants. She wants gardens with constructed an open, made from sturdy fills one bin with grass clippings and inserts her garden stir the pile, adding levels. This speeds process. Avid buries

Avid's friend, Master Composter, advises her that the best compost not only uses a wide variety of materials, but uses a good mix of brown (carbon) and green (nitrogen) materials which provide the absolute best conditions for all the decomposers in her composter.

Browns and greens? Covered vs uncovered? Thrifty Gardener and his Composting Friends suggest you check out the links below for many more of the details you might be looking for.

And, as always, you can contact the Tulsa County Master Gardeners by phone or e-mail and we will be happy to advise and direct you in your composting quest.



Tulsa County Master Gardeners compost bins at OSU Extension Office

[Backyard Composting-OSU Extension factsheet HLA-6448](#)

[Home Composting Guide for Home Gardeners-Penn State University Extension](#)

[Composting at Home-U.S. Environmental Protection Agency](#)

[Composting for the Homeowner-University of Illinois Extension](#)