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NEWS RELEASE FROM THE OFFICE OF:

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RECYCLING GARDEN WASTES VIA COMPOSTING

With winter at hand and leaf drop almost completed, now is the time to start a compost pile for next year's garden soil.

Compost is defined as a mixture of soil and partly decayed organic matter that is used to improve garden or potting soil. Waste materials, such as leaves, grass clippings, table scraps, manure and old plant material are the basic components of compost.

The best way to compost materials in your yard is to make a compost pile or bin. It should be located in an area receiving plenty of sunlight and air movement. The location should also be well drained and convenient to the garden area. Usually the small area behind the garage or between the utility room and the neighboring fence is ideal for framing and constructing the compost heap.

The compost area may be a pit or a raised area formed by treated boards, concrete building blocks or fencing supported by stakes. When starting the compost pile, begin with an initial application of one or two inches of soil, followed by a layer of leaves, grass clippings or other waste materials two to six inches thick. This should be followed by one or two inches of manure. If manure is not available, the addition of one to two cupfuls of commercial fertilizer per square yard of surface area scattered over the plant material is satisfactory. This layering process is repeated.

The organic materials to be composted will decompose more rapidly if they are shredded first. Leaves can be shredded by running your lawn mower over them and catching them in the grass catcher. While the compost is making, it should be kept moist, but not soggy wet. The top of the pile should be kept dish-shaped to catch natural rainfall and to help when wetting is necessary.

Decomposition relies on microorganisms, and the length of time before the pile will be ready for use in the garden is dependent on their growth. Warm weather, adequate fertilizer and the correct moisture level are important. Too little or too much of any of these factors will reduce growth and delay decomposition.

Your finished compost can be used in many ways; incorporated into the soil if is beneficial in improving soil tilth, water holding capacity and nutrient retention. Compost can also be used on the soil surface as a mulch to control weeds and conserve moisture. You can mix your compost with soil or use it for potting plants, hanging baskets or a wide variety of other gardening purposes.

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