



Tucson
Organic
Gardeners

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Why Make Compost?

Why do you want to use the green waste and kitchen scraps from your residence to make compost? Why rake up all the dead leaves, twigs, and dried plants and bag them? What else can be added to the compost pile? Hair, human or animal, shredded newspaper, dryer lint, nut shells, and many more items that are discarded into the landfill each day. Left in a pile, watered when dry, stirred frequently; it makes an additive for the garden that has been made from waste. But the most important reason to compost is to save MONEY.

Save on the water bill. Water is the most expensive addition to the vegetable garden and orchard. By replacing half the soil with compost, the water bill should be cut in half. Compost increases the soil's holding capacity up to 50%. When the rains happen, the soil will absorb the water faster with less compaction. Because of the increased humus, plants are able to survive wind and storms, since their roots go deeper and the plants are anchored. Because the soil has better aeration, plants are able to retain the moisture in their leaves and root systems.

Save on nutrients (fertilizer). The University of Arizona has completed tests proving compost in the desert soil allows the nutrients that occur naturally, but unavailable to non-native plants, to be absorbed by their root systems. Therefore one uses less nutrients such as, alfalfa meal, cottonseed meal, crushed rock, greensand, and kelp meal etc. As compost is added year after year, the quality of the soil increases the harvest yield, and keeps increasing for each year compost is added. Because the plants are healthier, there is increased immunity to diseases and pests. Larger plants mean a bigger harvest. The healthy plants means we who eat their fruit are also healthier. The taste quality of organically grown food is very noticeable.

Save on time and energy, which translates into money saved, which means less maintenance time in the garden. Because of improved soil, what weeds do appear are easier to pull. Compost used as mulch keeps the weeds from sprouting because sunlight doesn't reach weed seedlings. The water is used for the crops, not for weeds. The soil does not compact, so digging is easier. The hard pan or caliche will gradually disappear, thus allowing the roots to grow further and broader. Since the soil has better stabilization, there is less erosion and flooding problems. Less erosion means not having to replace soil for the garden bed.

Save on pollution and reduce environmental problems. Using the materials in the compost that accumulate around your space means doing your bit to save on pollution. Up to 30% less yard waste goes to the landfill. Putting kitchen food scraps in the compost pile will ease the load on sewage plants. Fewer toxins are in the environment because no poisons are needed to keep crops healthy. A healthy plant in healthy soil deters pests and diseases. Thus there is no need for pesticides and herbicides. Garbage pickup can be reduced. Since the trucks need to stop and start less often, there is less pollution in the air. Use untreated heirloom, organic, and open-pollinated seeds. These kinds of seeds can be saved from year to year. Hybridized seeds and seeds coated with chemicals will produce plants whose seeds will not be the same plant when saved and planted the next year. Compost appears to counter the effect of some portion of the poisons in the soil.

Save the macro and microorganisms. Using compost in the garden beds and around landscape plants attracts and feeds the earthworms that come to the surface, thus creating tunnels for water to flow to the root systems. Earthworms are the greatest recyclers, depositing their castings. This is rich fertilizer that the plants can use. Earthworms aerate the soil. Several inches of compost on top of the soil used as mulch absorbs the heat, thus preventing root burn. Composting the green waste instead of putting it directly on the soil preserves more of the nutrients. Green waste and manure can be added to the soil if the bed is not planted for several months. But the decomposing material will harm transplants and young plants from seed. Putting manure into the compost pile and using its heat to create compost is safer for the plants than putting the manure directly on the soil. Compost lowers the 8 or 9 pH normally found in this desert alkaline soil to 6.5 or 7 pH, thus making it possible to grow non-native vegetables, such as tomatoes and eggplant,

lettuce and string beans.

Save the soil. Compost puts life back into the soil, chemicals deplete the soil. Chemicals kill the microorganisms and bacteria; compost adds them to the soil, making the garden bed richer. Composting teaches children that bugs and worms are helpful creatures, not to be killed. Helping maintain the compost pile brings the wonders of science and nature to life. Children can see the beneficial insects, grubs and worms that are in and around the compost pile. Compost happens naturally, putting it in a bin where it can be stirred and watered makes it happen faster. Not only does a compost bin need heat and moisture, it also needs air for the microorganisms to break down the woody and course pieces that make up the pile. Our whole life depends on the topsoil. The thickness can vary from a thin layer on mountains to several feet deep in river valleys. But the greatest amount of agriculture is done on topsoil of 5 to 7 inches. So composting is investing in the future and building an asset by protecting that 5 inches. And last but not least: composting is the oldest form of recycling

Quickly then, these are the reasons to compost. 1. Save on the water bill. 2. Increase the moisture retainment in the soil. 3. The soil will quickly absorb rains. 4. Plants are able to withstand wind and storms. 5. Because of better soil aeration, plants retain moisture in leaves and roots. 6. Compost allows native nutrients to be used. 7. Buy fewer nutrients. 8. The soil quality is increased. 9. Compost improves plant resistance to disease and pests. 10. Plant yield is greater and the taste quality is improved. 11. Time and energy spent on garden chores is lessened. 12. Fewer weeds appear and are easier to pull. 13. Over time, the hard pan disappears. 14. Both soil and plants are stabilized. 15. Compost lessens the erosion. 16. Using yard waste to make compost saves 30% space in the landfill. 17. Since no poisons are needed to keep plants healthy, less toxins in the environment. 18. Garbage trucks will make fewer stops to pickup trash, which means less air pollution. 19. Stop using chemically treated seeds. 20. Compost counters the effect of poisons in the soil. 21. Compost provides food for earthworms. 22. Using compost for mulch preserves root systems of plants. 23. Composting green waste preserves nutrients. 24. Composting manure is safer for plants. 25. Using compost in garden beds lowers the pH in the soil. 26. Chemicals deplete soil, compost adds life. 27. Composting teaches children that bugs and worms are helpful creatures, not to be killed. 28. Compost happens naturally, putting it in a pile makes it happen faster. 29. Composting invests in the future by protecting the top layer of arable soil. 30. Composting is the oldest form of recycling.

These 30 reasons to compost explain how to save money, time, and energy. Since time and energy also mean saving money, why not use these reasons to make compost and enrich the soil in your yard and garden.

References: Backyard Composting by Harmonious Technologies; Jeff Ball's 60-Minute Garden by Jeff Ball; Let It Rot by Stu Campbell; Make Compost in 14 Days by editors of Organic Gardening Magazine; Solid Waste Department, City of Tucson. Lois H Lockhart June 2001