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Compost Heap

Take the dead leaves, grass clippings and the healthy plant residues from your vegetable garden to make a compost heap.

University of Minnesota extension soil scientists say in composting, waste plant materials and sometimes animal manures are converted to soil fertilizer. Use a mixture of coarse and compacted material. Shredding dry plant materials with a power lawn mower can help increase the rate of composting and maintain proper air and moisture conditions.

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Avoid making compost heaps from foods attractive to rodents such as meat scraps or cereals. Garbage is acceptable, but should be limited to peelings, pods and vegetable tops. Grease or fat degrade slowly and tend to slow the rapid decay of other organic materials, so they should not be used. A solid floor or a symmetrical, straight-sided and deep compost heap contained by tile blocks or wire fencing will minimize rodent problems.

Make your compost pile five-feet square at the base for the home garden. Add compost material to a new heap of layers with coarse materials at the bottom. Shredded or fine wastes should be added in six-inch layers. Sprinkle completed compost or black top-soil with lime or rock phosphate and proper amounts of nitrogen to the top of each layer. You may use phosphatic fertilizer about one pound of 0-45-0 fertilizer per 200 pounds of dry organic residues. Each layer should be sprinkled with water so that it becomes moist but not soggy. A well-managed compost heap with shredded materials should be ready for use in six to eight weeks under warm spring or fall conditions.

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