

LSU Sustainability Composting Article

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Environmental sustainability can be achieved in many different ways. Composting is an underused and underappreciated resource that allows an individual or a family to contribute to sustainability in their own home. Plants need more than just fertilizer to grow. They also need the micronutrients that composted soil will add. The organic components in a composted product prevent bacteria and fungus from infecting plants and add enriching material directly into the soil.

Composting is a mixture of decaying organic substances that is used for fertilizing soil. Compostable organic materials include fruit and vegetable peelings, yard wastes such as grass clippings, leaves, dead flowers and plants, old newspaper scraps, bills, dryer lint, hair, bread, coffee grinds and egg shells. Items that should not be used for composting are dairy products, meat, bone scraps, and large animal waste.

More than 50 percent of a household's trash is organic waste that home compost can keep out of a landfill. While households are working to make their meals healthier and greener, they are also increasing the amount of material that can be composted. This system allows people to feed the cycle of nature by putting nutrients back into the ground after they have taken them out.

Many people believe that they do not have the space or the time to compost, but this is a myth that I would like to disprove. No matter where you live, there are resources available which will help a household develop a composting system. You can purchase composting bins for your back yard, put the pile directly on the ground or in a hole, or by using a worm composting bin that fits under your sink or back porch. Wherever you put your compost pile, it needs to have a balance of carbon, nitrogen, oxygen, and water in order to heat up and break down the materials.

This isn't a process that will happen overnight. It is a project that takes time and must be worked with in order to be productive.

There are many positive reasons as to why composting should be incorporated into every household. I have compiled a list, with the help of the East Baton Rouge Recycling Office and the Department of Environmental Quality, to promote composting in our community.

Composting is a hands-on activity that the entire family can participate in, and the end results are a massive reduction of household waste, increased sustainability, education, an addition of nutrients into the soil, and a reduction of pollution.

Top Ten Reasons to Compost

1. Lessen the Load and Free up Space in the Landfill

Composting is a great way to recycle food and yard waste and it lowers the amount of organic material that is sent to a landfill.

2. Protect the Environment

When organic material is put into a landfill, it produces methane. According to the IPCC Fourth Assessment Report, methane is 72 times more powerful than carbon dioxide.

3. Nourish your Plants Naturally and Reduce your Dependence on Fertilizers and Pesticides.

Chemical fertilizers pollute our soil and groundwater. Instead of buying fertilizer for your plants, you can make it in the form of compost at home to make stronger and more resistant plants.

4. Enrich Your Soil and Increase your Garden's Productivity

Compost enriches your soil by increasing its nutrient content and it improves a plant's ability to anchor roots.

5. Reduce the Risk of Air and Groundwater Pollution.

Although landfills are lined with plastic and topped with soil, the risk of polluting the environment with toxins from our trash can be minimized with composting.

6. Protect Against Erosion and Improve Aeration

Compost improves soil structure and helps it resist erosion. Aeration is extremely important to soil health and compost promotes aeration.

7. Feed the Cycle

Worms are an integral part of the composting process because they balance the soil's pH levels, aerate the soil, and leave nutrients along the way as they feed off of the compost.

8. Save Money

Keeping organic waste out of your trash cans and using it to make compost reduces your garbage bill. Compost is virtually free and keeps you from purchasing pricy potting and gardening soils from nurseries and other gardening stores.

9. You can do it just about anywhere.

You don't need much space for composting. You can keep worm bins or small compost containers on your deck or under your sink.

10. Teach your kids that their waste is a resource.

Composting is a way to educate your children about how to reduce their waste and will give them the tools they need to turn their trash into a useful environmental material.

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Photos of the Garden Show Exhibit and Backyard compost pile

