AgriLIFE EXTENSION
Texas A&M System

Earth Kind:
Environmental Stewardship Program

Walker County LEAF-PRO projects support the Texas AgriLife Extension Service, Earth Kind: Environmental Stewardship Program.

What are the guiding principles of Earth Kind?

Base your horticultural decisions on:

- A deep, abiding respect for the environment.
- The latest scientifically-sound, research-based information.
- Employ Earth Kind techniques of plant selection and culture to avoid pest problems before they occur.
- Use pesticides only as a last resort. If a pesticide becomes absolutely necessary, then select the most Earth Kind or environmentally responsible product available.
- Putting Earth Kind techniques into everyday practice will help your family, your business, your community and your environment. Remember, "Earth Kind to benefit human kind."

Texas Master Gardener

Walker County Master Gardeners

LEAF-PRO
Landscape Environmental Awareness Facility
Protection Reduction Outreach

Educational Publication Information Series

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Composting & Landscape Waste Recycling!

Walker County

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Houston-Galveston Area Council

TCEQ

LEAF-PRO project funding provided by: Houston-Galveston Area Council & Texas Commission on Environmental Quality

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What is LEAF-PRO?
The LEAF-PRO project is an educational outreach effort designed to demonstrate and promote educated, ecologically responsible decision making through home landscape practices.

The objectives of LEAF-PRO are:
Protection of our environment,
Reduction of solid waste, and
Outreach education.

Composting & Landscape Waste Recycling!

Why Compost?
Composting allows a positive use of many "waste" products produced in the home landscape and garden. Composting items such as leaves, grass clippings, twigs, bark and plants removed from your planting beds and garden can provide material which will conserve moisture, prevent weeds and provide soil fertility benefits.

What Can Be Composted?
A variety of materials can be successfully composted from the home landscape and garden. Leaves, grass clippings, chipped limbs or twigs, vegetable scraps from the kitchen, and unwanted plants can be utilized. Composting works best when different materials, both wet and dry, are mixed together.

What Should Not Be Composted?
Items such as kitchen scraps containing meat, and oils should not be composted. Additionally, it is good practice to not include seed heads from weeds in your compost pile.

How Long Does It Take?
Leaves will naturally compost over a 5 month to 2 year period if left to themselves. With proper management, this process can be sped up considerably. Incorporation of nitrogen sources such as livestock manure or other organic wastes, 40-70% moisture, regular aeration, and smaller sized particles of dry landscape waste (those processed in a chipper/shredder unit) will assist in accelerating the composting process. Proper mixtures and management can easily create compost in one to two months if not sooner.

What Makes Compost, well.. Compost?
The success and science of compost is based on the carbon to nitrogen ratio. Ideal proportions for the C:N ratio is a 30:1 ratio by weight. The C:N ratio is reached by utilizing mixtures of various landscape and garden wastes. Dry materials (brown stuff) such as straw, wood chips and fallen leaves are high in carbon and low in nitrogen. Fresh plant material (green stuff) such as grass clippings, pruned leaves, fresh plant material, kitchen scraps and manures are high in nitrogen and low in carbon.

What Do I Put My Compost In?
For a successful composting project, the first step is to utilize an appropriate holding unit. These can be purchased; however, recycled fencing supplies work just as well. A materials list includes: 10-foot length of 36-inch-wide chicken wire or field fence, heavy wire for tying, three or four metal posts for support (if needed). The fencing material can be made into a circular shape that is approximately 3 feet in diameter (the magic number). Other materials such as leftover concrete building blocks or recycled lumber can be utilized just as easily. A real secret of successful compost bins is ease of access for regular turning of the pile during the composting process.

So What Is The Recipe For Compost?
Layers.. Layers… First in the compost pile is a 6 inch layer of bulky brown material (wood chips & brush trimmings work well). Next add a 6 inch layer of high carbon material such as leaves, straw, hay or a mixture of all. Water thoroughly. Add a nitrogen source such as manure or fertilizer (do not utilize products with herbicides such as weed & feed mixtures). If livestock manure is available, apply a 1 to 2 inch layer. When utilizing commercial fertilizer, add 1 cup of ammonium nitrate or 3 cups of 10-10-10 per each 3 bushels of brown stuff added to the pile. Other sources of organic nitrogen include: blood meal, and cottonseed meal. You may choose to add 1/4 inch layer of soil or completed compost to introduce beneficial microorganisms into the compost process. As each layer is added, mix them with the previous layer to help inoculate the pile. Next add a 3 to 4 inch layer of high nitrogen material (green stuff). Now the process can start over with a layer of brown stuff and repeat as before until your compost pile is about 3 feet tall.

View practical demonstrations on the grounds of the Walker County Master Gardener LEAF-PRO Demonstration Gardens (102 Tam Road, Huntsville, Texas)

Layers:

Green Stuff
Nitrogen Source
Brown Stuff
→ Mix & Water

Green Stuff
Nitrogen Source
Brown Stuff
→ Mix & Water

Continue layers until compost pile is approximately 3 feet tall.