

Addicted To Composting

It was in the fall of 1998 that I took up composting. Most Saturday mornings were spent watching gardening shows on HGTV and DIY. I understood that without good soil a garden was doomed to failure. What better way to achieve good soil but with compost?

I wanted to find out more about composting before I began. So I went on a search for a book on composting. There are many good books out there with a lot of good information on composting. But one book really caught my eye because of the title, "Let It Rot" by Stu Campbell. How appropriate because that is what happens when plant material decomposes. I read that book cover to cover. I'm sure I got some strange looks from people when I took it to read while waiting for an appointment. I enjoyed that book as much as any novel I'd ever read!

There are numerous methods of composting. The three bin system is probably one of the most efficient methods to compost. The first bin holds your raw material. The second bin holds the compost material you are currently working on. When it is completely composted you place it in the third bin. This method is for someone with plenty of room plus excess energy. Since I have neither, this was not the method I chose.

I decided to go the slower way. I found a good size plastic bin that snapped together at one of the big box stores for \$75. It wasn't too ugly and I found a place in the back corner of the yard behind the shed to hide it. With this method all I had to do was add garden waste and produce from my kitchen that was past the point of human consumption. I had to turn the pile a few times a week and keep it moist but not wet.

We had an abundance of leaves at our South Austin home. The main component of my compost was leaves for the carbon portion of my compost. For the nitrogen portion I mostly used vegetable waste from left over produce. I also used a store bought compost activator.

There are several good compost activators to help get your compost cooking. You can just leave some compost from your last batch and mix it in with your next batch. Blood Meal and animal manure are good nitrogen sources to get compost going quicker.

The recommended carbon to nitrogen mixture is 30:1. It doesn't have to be exact-after all who is going to stand there and measure everything. A general rule is that if it is breaking down too slowly, you probably have too much carbon or you are not keeping it damp enough. If it is smelly, you either have it too wet or you have too much nitrogen.

My Husband once accused me of over buying fruits and vegetables so some would be left for the compost bin! I don't think I ever did that but it does cut down on the guilt when the produce in the refrigerator deteriorates past recognition. It can go into the compost instead of the trash and into a landfill.

In November of 2006 we sold our house in South Austin. We had thought about simplifying and moving to an apartment. So I gave my green plastic bin to a good friend and fellow gardener.

But then we decided that apartment life was not for us. We bought a house in Hutto, near all our Grand kids.

I was having deep withdrawal symptoms from not composting. I had been interested in trying a compost tumbler. So we spent a little more than was practical and bought a small compost tumbler through mail order. I also keep a garbage can nearby to store the raw material for the tumbler. With the tumbler, the best way to compost is to fill it up all at once and turn the handle at least five turns a day. It is an easy way to compost. No turning with a pitch fork or shovel. . I believe that the less waste we can put in our landfills, the better our environment. The richer the compost we put back in our gardens, the richer the soil will become, the less fertilizer we will need and the happier our plants will be. I'm glad to be addicted to composting!

About the Author

Patsy Bredahl is a Master Gardener in Williamson County, Texas. She is a retired nurse and enjoys spending time with her family including 10 grandchildren. If you are interested moving to the [Austin Texas](#) area, please visit [Austin Realtor](#) Ronnie Bredahl at [Austin Referral Realty](#).

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