ENRI-311

UK COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE
UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY — COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE

Constructing a Garbage Can Compost Bin

A compost bin can be built easily and inexpensively using either a metal garbage-can or 55-gallon barrel. These bins can be used for food or garden wastes, but the materials will need to be turned. Turning the materials can be easily accomplished by securing the lid on the bin, turning it on its side, and rolling it around the yard. This will allow for mixing and aeration of the materials. The compost will generally be ready for use within two to four months after the bin is filled. The major drawback with this type of structure is the volume of waste that can be handled.

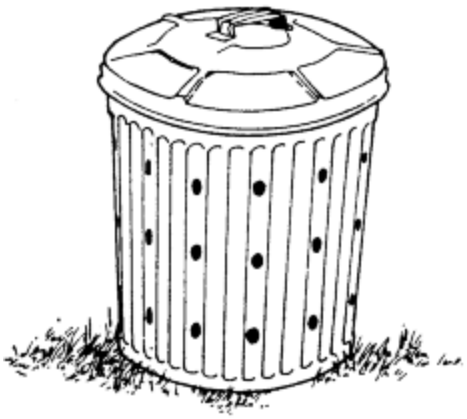

Figure 1 - Garbage Can Composter

Materials

- ☑ A plastic or metal garbage can with lid
- ☑ Coarse sawdust, straw, or wood chips

Or

- ☑ A 55-gallon plastic or metal barrel with lid (Be sure that the barrel has not been previously used for toxic chemicals.) *(Note: a hinge and latch may be used to secure the lid on the barrel)*

Tools

- ☑ Drill
- ☑ Work gloves

Building a Compost Bin Using a Garbage Can

1. Drill three rows of holes 4 to 6 inches apart all around the sides of the garbage can. Then drill several holes in the base of the garbage can. The holes allow air movement and the drainage of excess moisture.

2. Place 2 to 3 inches of dry sawdust, straw or wood chips in the bottom of the can to absorb excess moisture and let the compost drain.

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Building a Compost Bin Using a 55-gallon Barrel

1. Drill six to nine rows of 1/2-inch holes around the barrel.

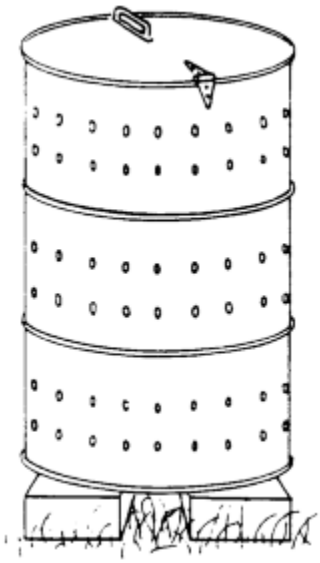

Figure 2 - 55-gallon Barrel Composter

*Regarding use of wood products in gardening and composting projects: The University of Minnesota conducted a study on a raised bed garden made from Chromated Copper Arsenate (CCA) *pressure-treated* wood. Results showed that the vegetables grown can accumulate arsenic from the CCA pressure-treated wood, however, based on U.S. Public Health Standards, these vegetables would be safe for human consumption. Alternative building materials are currently available. This information is provided so that consumers are aware of the potential issues related to treated wood. If using scrap lumber or other used materials make sure you know if the lumber/materials are treated and what they have been used for in the past. Consumers should use their own judgment when constructing garden or compost units. For more information on wood products contact the University of Kentucky Forestry Department at 859-257-7597 or foresty.extension@uky.edu.

Composting Basics

1. Be sure that your compost pile receives a balanced diet. You will need to include materials that are high in carbon as well as materials that are high in nitrogen. High carbon materials include paper, sawdust, wood chips, straw and leaves. High nitrogen materials include food scraps, grass clippings, and manure. Nitrogen fertilizer may also be added if necessary.

2. Maintain proper particle size. Items like leaves, limbs and newspaper work best if shredded or chopped into ¼ inch pieces. Food scraps should also be cut into small-sized particles.

3. Make sure that your compost receives a proper amount of air. Turning or mixing every week or so will help insure proper air flow.

4. Check the moisture level in the compost. Performing the "squeeze test" will tell you if the moisture level is correct. Compost should be damp to touch, but drops should not come out when you squeeze it. Add dry straw or sawdust if too damp and add water if too dry.

5. Monitor the temperature of the compost. Temperatures between 90° and 140°F are ideal. Compost bins at 3 feet x 3 feet x 3 feet size maintain temperature better.

Adapted with permission from *Composting to Reduce the Waste Stream,* published by NRAES, Cooperative Extension, 152 Riley-Robb Hall, Ithaca, New York 14853-5701. (607)255-7654. Adapted for use in Kentucky by Kim Henken and Jenny Cocanougher, Extension Associates for Environmental and Natural Resource Issues with the University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service.

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