

THE MAPLE STREET RAG

Forest Grove Community Gardens News

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Workshop Uncovers Secrets of Composting

On October 17, Greg Shipp of Wildberry Organics presented a class on composting for Forest Grove Community Gardens.

Compost is the organic, humus-rich fertilizer produced by the controlled decay of plant and animal waste.

An important factor in speedy making of compost is making sure there is air circulation inside the pile, Greg says. For this reason, the process begins with a layer of corn stalks, sunflower stalks or other large and relatively tough vegetable waste.

This is piled on the ground about 6 inches deep, no more than 4 feet wide, and as long as you wish the compost pile to be. Posts of 4-to 6-inch diameter are imbedded in the pile at about 2 or 3-foot intervals.

After a few days, these will be pulled out to provide “chimneys” for air infiltration into the pile. Green garden waste (vegetable plants and vines, weeds, etc.) are then piled onto this base, perhaps 6 inches deep, and a thin layer of animal manure (in this case, sheep manure) is shoveled on top.

A layer of straw or old hay can be added on top of this to provide air circulation within the pile. A layer of garden soil, which provide microorganisms to begin the composting process, is added with fertilizer and/or ashes to provide phosphorus and other nutrients.

Then the pile is given additional layers of green waste, manure, straw and soil, stacked like layers in a sandwich. When the pile is half finished, water is sprayed over it to moisten the ingredients, and again when the pile reaches a



Compost is a nutrient-rich soil amendment.

height of about 4 feet.

After this, a final “casing” of soil is put over the entire pile to hold in the heat. To ensure adequate air circulation, a compost pile should be no more than 4 feet wide at the base and no more than 4 feet high, but it can be as long as you wish. After the finished pile has sat for a few days, it should begin heating up as aerobic fermentation begins inside.

At this point, the poles imbedded in the pile are removed. Insert a hand in the holes to detect the heat of fermentation, which can reach 160 degrees—hot enough to cook and kill

weed seeds. When fermentation slows and the pile begins cooling down, perhaps in two or three weeks, the pile should be turned “inside-out” by shoveling the layers into reverse order next to the old site. With the chimney posts inserted, the pile should heat up again as fermentation begins anew in the materials that were formerly on the outside of the pile.

The more often the pile is turned, the faster finished compost can be produced, Gregg says. However, a pile that is built in the fall and left undisturbed will continue to compost well enough that it should be ready for use by spring.

Since more materials for composting are available, another class in composting can be presented if enough gardeners express an interest. Please send an e-mail to waltw@teleport.com for information.

To learn more about Greg and Wildberry Organics, go to www.wildberryorganics.com.

Garden Will Close for Winter

The garden site will essentially close after November 1. There will be no toilet facility or garbage disposal. Irrigation water will be shut off around November 15.

Plot rental agreements for 2009 expire November 1. To reserve your plot(s) for 2010, call (503) 357-4577

or e-mail waltw@teleport.com.

If you are doing winter gardening, your rental agreement will be honored until March 2010. Pack out anything you bring to the site.

Gardening tools, structures or other equipment left at unreserved plots or those without winter crops will become the property of Forest

Grove Community Gardens.

Gardeners should have received a letter in mid-October via e-mail that further explains this information.

Work parties this fall and next spring will prepare the ground for next season’s planting. If you want to participate in a work party, call (503) 357-4577.