THE EDIBLE GARDEN

SEPTEMBER 2014

GARDEN ACTIVITIES

- Save seeds from fruiting plants, such as tomatoes, squashes, melons, beans… something for the kids?
- After harvesting your crops remove any dead plants and leaves to the compost.
- Cultivate the soil to expose insect eggs and larvae to predators such as birds.
- Take the opportunity to add compost or manure to prepare the soil for next spring.
- Pot up and bring in tender herbs before the first frost. Place in a sunny window for a continuing supply.
- Take basil cuttings place in a jar of water and wait for the roots to grow before potting.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Hot compost; to kill pathogens, fungi and seeds compost heaps need to reach and maintain temperature of 55 to 65 °C. To ensure all the compost reaches this temperature the heap must be turned frequently so the cooler outside material has a turn in the hotter centre.
- Cold compost; is a slower method allowing the materials to break down over a long period – a year or more. Pathogens, fungi and seeds will survive, as will organisms beneficial to garden. Materials don't need to be in a heap.
- A compost heap smells when anaerobic bacteria dominate the microbe population. Turning the heap will reintroduce oxygen to the pile and sweeten the odour.

BLACK GOLD

COMPOSTING MADE EASY

Dale Odorizzi
Master Gardener of Lanark

Gardeners dream about moist, well-drained loam to plant their edibles in. Most of us are stuck with sandy soil that is low in nutrients and does not hold water well or heavy clay that while rich in nutrients is a muddy mess in spring and akin to concrete as the summer drought rolls around. What is a poor gardener to do?

Kitchen

Compost! Compost is the magic ingredient that improves your soil, regardless of soil type. Compost helps to build soil structure. In sandy soil it supplies nutrients and improves water retention. In clay soil, improves the drainage, aeration and friability of your soil. The beauty of compost is that you cannot add too much. You can put it into the ground at any time. It feeds the soil not the plant!

You can purchase bags of compost or manure at garden centres or truck loads from various landscape depots or farm supply locations, even the City of Ottawa. The downside of this is cost and typically the commercially produced compost comes from only one source and may not have a diverse variety of nutrients.

The solution to this dilemma is to make your own. Every week bags and bins of organic material is put out to the curb and trucked away to landfill sites or the City composting facility. It could easily be put into your

compost pile to be used at a later time in your garden.

The ideal time to create a compost pile is in the fall. As we start harvesting our crops, we are left with leaves and stems that helped our vegetables grow so well. Rather than throw them away, start your own compost pile. You will be returning nutrients to your soil that your vegetables absorbed all season. If any of your plants have evidence of disease, do not compost. Send those plants to the municipal composting site where the compost cooks. Most of us cannot raise the temperature of our compost high enough to kill the disease spores. Leaves are another terrific source of nutrients for your garden and are readily available at this time of year.

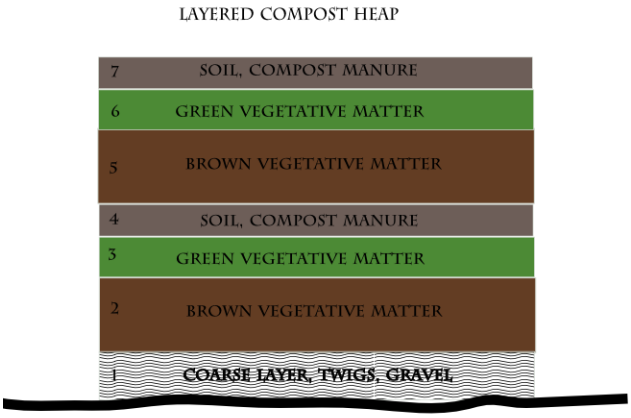
Main Composter—was full of leaves and garden waste in fall

You can be as creative as you like in creating your compost pile. Some people use the black plastic composters. These are relatively small and you will likely soon run out of space. Others use a pile method with some kind of structure to keep your compost in place. The third method is simply to pile your organic waste in a big pile and let it sit. If you choose the third method it is wise to make two piles. One for this year's waste and one for last year's waste. In that manner, you will be able to get at your finished compost without having to move multiple years' worth of matter.

All organic matter eventually breaks down. Walk in the forest and dig down a bit and under the leaves, you will find nice black loam. Mother Nature is a great composter. While there are no hard and fast rules for making compost, there are a few guidelines. The smaller the pieces going into the pile, the quicker they will break down. Compost needs air and water to work. A dry pile of leaves remains just that without air and water. The more you turn your compost pile, the faster you get compost. I tend to turn my pile once per year and put the finished compost in its bin and unfinished compost back into its pile. Finally, do not put fats, meats and bones or diapers into your composter. This will attract animals and could cause the spread of infection as home composters do not get hot enough to kill pathogens

Finished compost pile

When you are building your compost pile, the ideal combination is to have a layer of vegetative matter and then a layer of manure or soil. There are two types of vegetative matter—green and brown. Green matter can be fresh green plants such as lawn clippings, weeds that have not set seed, remains from your vegetable garden and kitchen waste. Brown matter is vegetative matter that has turned brown such as leaves in autumn. Green waste tends to decompose very rapidly but tends to smell. If you just put kitchen waste into your composter, it will stink and your compost will be a wet slimy mess. Every few buckets of kitchen waste I add to my composter, I also add a bucket of last year's leaves or shredded newspaper, another good source of "brown vegetative matter". Brown matter by itself takes a long time to break down. Brown and Green together becomes a decomposing machine. A shovel full of soil, manure or compost every second or third layer adds microorganisms that help activate your compost pile. Continue layering your pile as shown. There is no need to purchase compost accelerator. It is expensive, smelly and does not work as well as a bucket of kitchen waste or some grass clippings.



SAVING TOMATO SEED

Dale Odrizzi
Master Gardener of Lanark

Did you grow a tomato you loved this summer? Try saving its seeds so you can enjoy the same great taste next year... Save seeds from tomatoes that are:

- Open-pollinated or heritage plants. Seeds saved from hybrid tomatoes won't come true.
- Fully ripe, but not over-ripe.
- Healthy with nice tomatoes

Saving seeds from an inferior plant will result in inferior tomatoes next year

Slice the tomato crosswise, not from stem end to blossom end. Squeeze the seeds and surrounding gel into a plastic or glass container. Pour 5-8 cm (2-3 inches) of water over the seeds in your container. Cover the container with plastic wrap and poke a hole in the centre. Label your container and set it in a spot where it won't be in the way or disturbed too much. Let it sit for 2-3 days until you see white mould growing on top of the water. This is a sign that the gel coating surrounding the seeds has broken down. This process will smell bad!

Pour off the mould and as much water as possible and any seeds that are floating, as they will not germinate. Rinse a few times, pouring off the rinse water. Dump seeds into a fine mesh strainer and rinse well, using your fingers to dislodge gel that sticks to the seeds.

Write the name of your tomato variety on a paper plate or coffee filter and dump your seeds onto it. Make sure that the seeds are in a single layer so they dry well and don't get mouldy. Set labelled seeds aside for a few days to dry completely.

Once your seeds are completely dry, put them in an envelope, small baggie or other container to store. Label them properly and store in a cool, dark dry place. When stored properly, tomato seeds will germinate reliably for up to 10 years or even more.

While most tomato seed savers use this fermentation approach, you can also try the "non-fermentation" method. Slice it in half horizontally. Scoop out the seeds and place them on the paper towel. Note that each seed is enclosed in a gel-like sac. As you spread the seeds on the paper towel, space them so that they're 0.5 cm to 2.5cm (one-half to one inch) apart from each other. When placing each seed, gently press the gel into the paper to disburse it a bit. After arranging your seeds on the paper towel, set your paper towel on wax paper or plastic wrap then move the towel to a warm, dry environment. The towel will wick moisture away from the seeds quite quickly. Allow several days drying time. Once the towel and seeds are completely dry, separate the towel from the wax paper and fold the towel so that the seeds are on the inside. Use the top outside of the folded towel to label your seeds. Store the seeded towel in a relatively airtight container at room temperature. When it is time to plant the seeds, you can plant the paper towel and seeds in your pot.

Your seeds will be more resistant to disease if you use the longer, smelly process. Either way by next August you will be able to enjoy your favourite tomatoes all over again!

BOOK REVIEW

Dale Odorizzi,
Master Gardener of Lanark

LET IT ROT!

THE HOME GARDENERS GUIDE TO COMPOSTING

Stu Campbell, Storey communications inc.
ISBN-0-88266-048-7
152 Pages

This little book has been around a long time. My copy was published in 1975 but it has had subsequent releases. It presents a relaxed, easy-going approach to composting. Too often, when authors talk of composting, they become too scientific and frighten people off. The most useful statement I read in this book the first time around was "Eventually, everything organic will decompose". I could relax and not worry that every ratio is in balance. Stu Campbell then proceeds to explain various steps you can use to make decomposition happen more quickly.

It demonstrates with illustrations, how to construct the equipment necessary to build a compost pile with materials readily available. It contains a detailed guide to materials you can use to make compost including weeds, grass, ashes, tea leaves and even old rags (have you ever left your garden glove in your composter?).

While the author presents information simply and clearly, he also provides the technical terminology and explains the importance of microorganisms and the Carbon Nitrogen ratio so that you can gain a full understanding of the science of composting.

Finally, *Let it Rot!* places the art of composting in perspective with ecology, conservation and waste conversion movements.

The third edition is available at Chapters and Amazon and is available in both paper and e-formats.

Recipe

Rebecca Last,
Master Garden of Ottawa Carleton

EASY BASIL PESTO

2 cups (packed) fresh basil leaves, washed and patted dry
1 cup olive oil
½ cup grated Parmesan or Romano cheese
½ cup toasted pine nuts, almonds or walnuts
2 medium cloves fresh garlic chopped coarsely
Salt and pepper to taste
Optionally, add zest and juice of one lemon

1) Combine basil, garlic, cheese, nuts and salt and pepper in a blender or food processor, and chop finely.
2) With machine still running, slowly drizzle in the olive oil.
3) Mix well and freeze for a fresh summer taste all winter long!

Notes and Alternatives

- If using purple basil, we found that the walnuts add a nice, nutty flavour.
- This basic recipe can be used for all kinds of herbs. Try it with:
  Coriander and serve with fish.
  Mint – omit the cheese, and serve with lamb.
  Nasturtium leaves give a peppery taste (Some sources suggest lightly steaming the leaves first. Some include the flowers.)
- Cheese can be added before or after freezing, or omitted altogether for those with lactose intolerance.

Watch for Trowel Talk the Master Gardeners of Ottawa Carleton electronic monthly gardening newsletter available on the 15th at http://mgottawa.mgoi.ca/

Visit the Almonte online community newspaper 'The Millstone' - http://millstonenews.com/ -for a column by David Hinks of the Ottawa Carleton Master Gardeners; under the Gardening tab

Photographs: Dale Odorizzi (compost heaps), Susan Bicket (tomato half), MaryAnn Van Berlo (tomato plants)
The Edible Garden logo was created by Jon Last (jonlast13@rogers.com)

Master Gardeners of Ottawa-Carleton is a member group of Master Gardeners of Ontario Inc., a registered charity with the mission of providing gardening advice to homeowners