

Lake Oswego / West Linn HOMES

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Learn how to collect rainwater and why it's important

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Don't toss out your yard trimmings and food scraps — compost them in your backyard

Anytime of year is a great time to start composting, said Nicole Forbes, assistant manager at Dennis' Seven Dee's Landscaping and Garden Center in Lake Oswego. And with the holidays nearly upon us — with plenty of shopping and cooking — why not put leftover trimmings and scraps to good use?

Composting — transferring organic material into a dark, soil-like material called compost — results from the breakdown of organic materials such as grass clippings, leaves, twigs and branches. And it's as easy as throwing the right leftovers into a can.

Forbes said that many homeowners pay for yard debris pickup each month.

"Most people know what they can and can't put in their yard debris (bin). Anything that goes in your yard debris (bin) can be composted," she said. "People pay for yard debris pickup,

then turn around and buy \$10 bales of compost at nurseries. You can make this stuff yourself."

Forbes suggested saving the money usually spent on soil to instead buy plants. Composting avoids being wasteful while using natural resources to produce a high quality, inexpensive soil.



Nicole Forbes said that Seven Dees creates its

RAKING THE BENEFITS

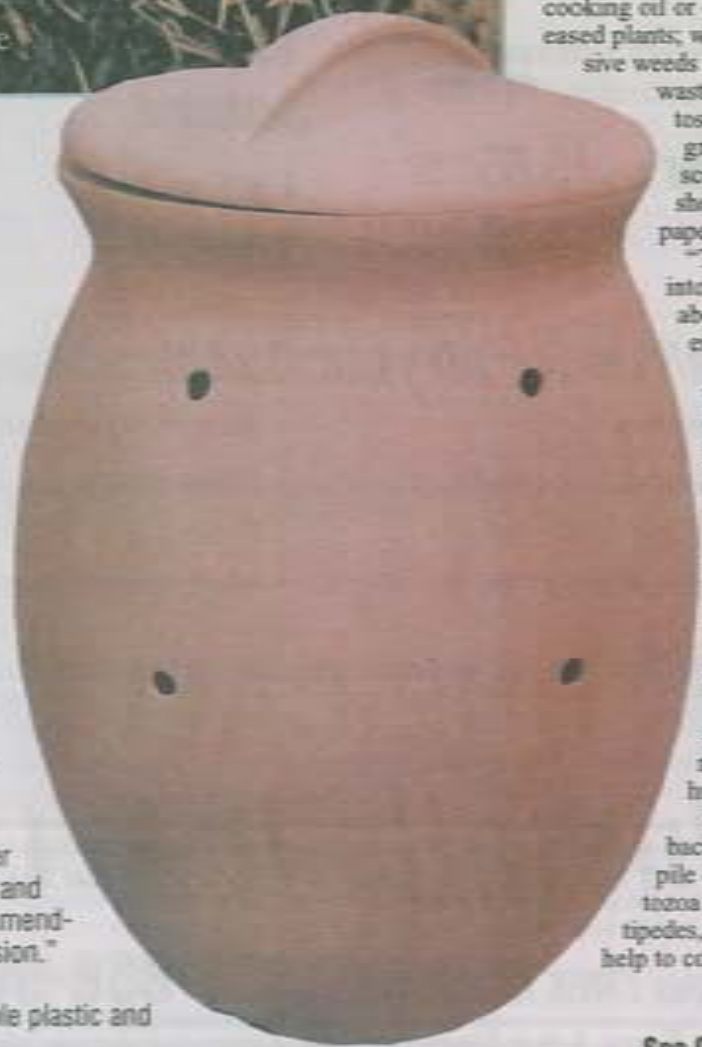
■ Story by Staff Reporter Nicole DeCosta
Photos by Staff Photographer Vern Uyetake



Top: Melissa Dittman with Dennis' Seven Dees Landscaping and Garden Center rakes leaves at the Lake Oswego store before composting them.

Above: The compost is finished when it looks like dirt, said Seven Dees Assistant Manager Nicole Forbes, "and smells like what you would get out of a bag from the nursery — rich and with almost a cake-like texture. ... The compost that comes out can be added as a soil amendment — like a top dressing over a planting area to add nutrition — and for weed suppression."

Right: The Terra Composter looks like it's made from terracotta, but is molded from durable plastic and comes with a plastic shovel.



own compost, according to the Web site www.HowToCompost.org. And getting started is easy and only requires a three-by-three-foot space.

Forbes demonstrated how to use three similar compost bins at Seven Dees. The Earth Machine composter — similar in shape to a dog house — composts from turning contents occasionally with a shovel. The Achla horizontal spinning composter sits off the ground and spins its contents like numbers for a raffle — no shovel required. The nice-looking Terra Composter — which looks like a large Terracotta pot with a rear door — sits upright, displayed proudly in a garden.

While different in shape, each compost bin works similarly to decompose brown carbon-rich materials — such as fall leaves — with green nitrogen-rich materials — like grass clippings, Forbes said. Mix one to two parts of brown material with one part of green materials. Air and water are the other two ingredients.

"The greatest thing about composting is that you can put almost anything in there but you want a balance of materials," Forbes said. "There's more to compost than not to compost."

Some items not to place in the bins are meat or fish parts; dairy products; grease; cooking oil or oily foods; bread or grains; diseased plants; weeds with seed heads and invasive weeds such as morning glory; and pet wastes. Most everything else can be tossed in — fresh grass clippings, green leaves, vegetable and fruit scraps, coffee grounds, egg shells, straw and shredded newspaper.

"The smaller the pieces you put into your compost," Forbes said of about six-inch pieces, "the quicker it's going to compost."

Turning the contents in the bin helps it break down more quickly. According to the elected regional government Metro, there should be enough water to make the compost "as moist as a wrung-out sponge." In four months to a year you should have soil-like compost to harvest from the bottom of the pile, according to Metro.

"In a healthy handful of soil," Forbes said, "there are more organisms than there are humans on earth."

Decomposition occurs when bacteria begin breaking down the pile of debris. Then fungi and protozoa begin to help. Later, centipedes, millipedes, beetles and worms help to complete the decomposition.

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What do you use to create compost?

Compost formula: add one part green to one or two parts brown within your compost bin

Green (one part)

- Fresh grass clippings
- Green leaves
- Plant stalks
- Hedge trimmings
- Vegetable and fruit scraps
- Coffee grounds, filters
- Tea bags
- Egg shells
- Horse, cow and poultry manures



Brown (one or two parts)

- Woody prunings
- Leaves and twigs
- Straw
- Wood chips
- Old potting soil
- Shredded newspaper

Do not compost:

- Meat or fish parts
- Dairy products
- Grease, cooking oil or oily foods
- Bread or grains
- Diseased plants
- Weeds with seed heads and invasive weeds
- Pet wastes

Source: Metro



Compost: "What you put in to composting you get out"

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These organisms work best in the pile when it is damp.

A balance of carbon and nitrogen with adequate moisture and aeration will cause the temperature within the bin to rise.

"It can reach more than a hundred degrees within a can," Forbes said, "and that's a good thing. It means decomposition is happening."

So, when is the compost complete and ready to distribute into the yard?

"(It's finished when) it looks like dirt, and smells like what you would get out of a bag from the nursery — rich and with almost a cake-like texture. ... The compost that comes out can be added as a soil amendment — like a top dressing over a planting area to add nutrition — and for weed suppression," Forbes said.

According to Metro, mix one to three inches of compost into vegetable and flower gardens each year before planting. Spread one to two inches of compost around annual flowers and vegetables and up to four inches around trees and shrubs. Make sure to keep the mulch a few inches away from stems to prevent plant diseases.

Compost can also be used as a potting mixture when one part is added to two parts commercial potting soil.

Forbes said hot composting — which requires more effort but decomposes faster using several bins — and worm composting — which utilizes red worms to decompose food waste — are also popular options to make compost.

as a liquid fertilizer — also referred to as compost tea — which is created when extracting compost in water and letting it brew.

Recently, Seven Dees, Forbes said, started making its own compost — saving on fuel costs and providing higher confidence of products sold to customers.

"This is not selfless," Forbes said. "What you put in to composting you get out."

Dennis Seven Dees Landscaping and Garden Center is located at 1090 McVey Ave.



STAFF PHOTOS / VERN UYETAKE
Above: Dennis Seven Dees Landscaping and Garden Center in Lake Oswego carries three different compost bins — The Earth Machine at left, Achia horizontal spinning composter at right and the Terra composter at top.

Far left, above: Dr. Earth Compost Starter speeds up the decomposition of raw organic materials because it contains the necessary microbes to break it down within a compost bin.



in Lake Oswego, phone: 503-636-4660.

For more information about composting from Metro, visit the Web site at www.oregon-metro.gov/compost.

The Earth Machine utilizes a twist, locking lid at top for easy access and has plenty of ventilation. With a circular shape, the bin is designed for easy, passive composting that's ready in four to six months, according to the manufacturer.