

Boiling Spring Lakes Retiree Uses Simpler Way To Compost

BY SUSAN USHER

It's so easy William Dunn doesn't understand why more people don't do it.

Shortly after moving with his wife, Thelma, from Virginia to Boiling Spring Lakes 16 years ago, this federal government retiree hit upon an easy, inexpensive approach to composting. His method doesn't require special purchase of composting agents, bins or wire or other materials and demands little day-to-day maintenance.

"To me it's great," Dunn said during a recent demonstration of his compost row. "All it takes is a shovel, a 4-foot by 8-foot piece of ground and a little elbow grease."

Dunn has been frustrated with the lack of interest by others in his system, given its ease of use, the value of compost and the great need to reduce the nation's waste stream. His role as the environmental program of work chairman for Brunswick County's Extension Club Council gives him an opportunity to help educate others on the need for waste reduction and encourage a change of habits.

Not everyone has an area as large as Dunn has for recycling, but he figures most people do have a spot at least 4-foot by 8-foot that they could set aside for that purpose.

Most homeowners get into composting because they use compost for mulching and for improving the soil in their vegetable garden or landscape.

But not Dunn; he gave up gardening long ago and his own yard requires little compost.

His pile—now about 15 years old—is part of an overall household waste reduction program that includes recycling of as many items as possible. His goal: to reduce the amount of waste that must be handled by the county's solid waste landfill.



WILLIAM S. DUNN of Boiling Spring Lakes incorporates everything from vegetable scraps to junk mail in his backyard composting pile, part of an overall effort to reduce the amount of household waste bound for the county landfill.

STAFF PHOTO BY SUSAN USHER

The program works so well that his 90-gallon garbage can only needs to be emptied once a year. It holds mainly with steel cans, certain plastics that cannot be recycled and items, such as water conditioning system salt bags, that have plastic liners.

All the cans have been rinsed, so there is no odor about the trash container even after it has sat partially filled for months.

There's been only one problem.

"The trash collection crew forgot me last January," said Dunn, "so I started putting the can out more often." As in twice a year instead of once a year.

Composting Good Way To Help Reduce Landfill-Bound Waste

It's becoming more and more obvious that disposing of waste material is a major issue of the 1990s, says Wilton Harrelson, an agriculture extension technician and retired agri-businessman.

"Waste management" is the catch-all terminology used for handling everything that no one wants. This involves hazardous waste, industrial waste, sewage, garbage, printed materials and containers of all kind, and organic waste that is generated at home.

Public landfills that are maintained and paid for by tax dollars are filling up, Harrelson says, and suitable locations are getting harder to find and more expensive.

A partial solution is recycling. This can be done by collecting and returning paper, some plastics, bottles and cans to a local recycling center.

Some disposal problems are beyond the control of the individual, but said Harrelson, every homeowner can contribute to the solution, rather than the problem.

How? By recycling organic biodegradable waste.

Leaves, grass clippings, straw, weeds, vegetable and flower parts and table scraps may be recycled into useful material by composting and using the finished compost as a soil amendment, mulch and potting soil ingredient. This will improve the texture, fertility and water-holding capacity of the soil and

make gardening more productive and enjoyable, he said.

Harrelson cautioned that diseased plants, plants that have been exposed to weed killer, bones and meat scraps should not be composted.

Composting bins may be made from fence wire, wood or concrete. If possible, they should be placed away from the house in a utility area and screened from view of you and your neighbors. The bins need to be 3 feet to 5 feet wide and 4 feet to 6 feet high, and whatever length is desired. Two such bins need to be constructed so that the composting material may be shoveled and rotated from one bin to the other.

Start the compost pile by adding a layer of leaves 6 to 8 inches thick. Sprinkle with water and add about an inch of soil. Use either one cup of 8-8-8 fertilizer and one cup of limestone or in their place, if available, a two-inch layer of horse manure. The manure or fertilizer provides nutrients for the micro-organisms and hastens the decomposition of the organic material.

Repeat this process of layering until the desired depth is reached.

The top should be finished off in a saucer shape to catch water, as this hastens decomposition. If possible, shovel the material about every eight weeks. This hastens the process.

The finished compost should be ready in four to six months, depending upon how well microbial activity is sustained through proper aeration, moisture and nutrients. When ready for use, the compost will be a dark brown color and crumble readily when handled.

Dunn's own compost row—it isn't much of a "pile" in the traditional sense of the word—is a 4 1/2- by 18-foot strip of land at the rear of his Cedar Street home.

To start the site, Dunn lifted about six inches of dirt with a shovel and "filled it with what I had," he said. That included lawn clippings, leaves, kitchen waste and other organic material. He then mixed in an almost equal amount of sand from his yard and a little 8-8-

had to stop taking magazines I decided to give it a try."

By the time he reaches the start of the row again, little remains other than plastic coatings from milk cartons, windows from business envelopes and the plastic shafts from Q-tips. The rest has turned into crumbly, rich, brown compost.

"It's simple and effective—that's all I can tell you," he says.

"All it takes is a shovel, a 4-foot by 8-foot piece of ground and a little elbow grease."

—William Dunn
Home composter

8 fertilizer to start the aerobic microbacterial action needed to break down the waste into compost.

"Once you get the action going in one of these piles it doesn't take long to break it down," said Dunn.

Without any additional effort on his part the pile produces finished compost, free of pathogens as well, in approximately six months. Turning, occasional addition of more fertilizer and other attention to the pile would speed up the process—if he needed more compost.

More recently, Dunn has expanded use of the compost pile to biodegrade paper products such as junk mail and magazines, turning a little more of the pile each week. "I knew that paper would work, but I hadn't tried it," he said. "But when our recycling center



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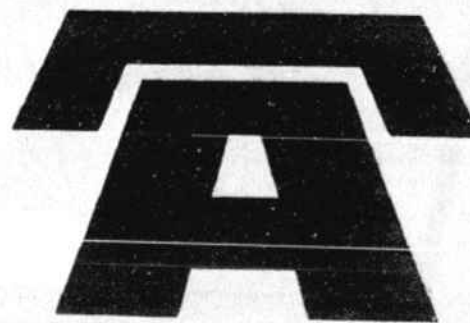
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