Composting

By Sandy McShea

Composting is recycling!
It isn’t complicated. It is a way of turning cast-away garbage into dark, rich humus. Granted, there are sophisticated ways to compost, but even a pile of leaves on the ground knows how to compost itself. So don’t be afraid.

Before we get started, you might ask, why compost? The answer is simple. Compost is what our Sandhills soil most needs to grow healthy plants, trees, and shrubs. Compost is partially decomposed organic matter. It helps the soil retain moisture, it improves soil structure, and it provides nutrients for plants. The decomposition of matter into compost is brought about by microorganisms. Because decomposition occurs slowly, nutrients are released into the soil gradually at a rate that plants can use. So let’s compost!

First, designate a place for the compost pile. For convenience, you will want it to be close to your garden, but not so close that it is the first thing that visitors see when they come to visit.

Second, decide what size pile will accommodate your needs.

Third, determine how much compost you will contain your future treasure.

When creating your compost pile you can add almost anything except meat, dairy products and the manure of meat-eating mammals. Horse manure, of which there is an ample supply in Moore County, is a great addition and it can also help your pile get started. Without manure, it is helpful to add some

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Local Activities of Interest

Farmers Market at the Campus of Sandhills Community College

Wednesdays through October 27
10 am-1 pm—Note new hours
Beside Aristotle Parking Lot
3395 Airport Rd., Pinehurst, NC 28374

8th Annual Weymouth Garden Tour

Saturday, June 4; 10 am to 3 pm
All gardens located within CCNC; lunch available at CCNC Clubhouse; tour includes afternoon garden landscaping presentation.
Advance Tickets: $15 (tour); $28 (tour and lunch)
Day of Event Tickets: $20 (tour); $35 (lunch & tour)
commercial or established compost to the pile to help it start decomposing faster.

Time is the distinction between composting methods. A compost pile put together properly will decompose faster than one simply thrown together. That brings us back to the manner of containment.

I think the most workable way to compost is to construct two side-by-side bins to hold the decomposing material. One pile is the "cooking" pile and the other the "adding to" pile. Eventually, you will have one pile that is ready to use and another that is decomposing. Alternatively, if you are not ready for the major commitment of a permanent structure, a piece of wire fencing wrapped around stakes or formed into a cylinder can make a fine compost container. Its temporary nature will enable you to try out different locations. It can even be placed in your garden or in a spot you want to eventually become a garden. There are complicated (and often expensive) gizmos on the market, but this method keeps it simple.

Once you have a location and a container, you can start adding to your pile. Technically a compost pile will "cook" better if it contains the proper ratio of materials that provide carbon and nitrogen.

Sometimes this ratio is referred to as brown (for carbon) versus green (for nitrogen). The desired ratio is 30 parts brown to 1 part green. For example, 30 parts of dry leaves to 1 part wilted lettuce from the refrigerator.

Unfortunately, pine needles are not a good source of brown matter. They are acidic and break down too slowly for use in the compost pile. Straw, however, is a good brown source. You can augment it with kitchen scraps such as broccoli stalks and/or vegetable scraps. Orange peels, egg shells, apple cores, and healthy trimmings from your garden are all good additions to your compost pile. Grass clippings from a lawn grown organically are also a good green addition.

So you have your manner of containment and you've added your brown matter and green matter. What then? Compost is formed by bacteria essentially eating away at your materials. If the balance is right, the pile will "cook" from the heat generated by the hungry bacteria. A hot pile will process faster than a cold pile, although the cold pile will eventually compost. Adding some existing compost or a shovel full of soil will provide bacteria to get the pile started, and it will also help the pile compost faster. Actively churning the pile periodically will also help your pile compost faster by blending the available materials. Churning the pile also helps add air to the pile.

Air, water and the right amounts of green and brown are all that your pile needs. And when it comes to water, the bacteria like the pile best when it is slightly wet, but not soggy.

So get started! Pile it up, stir it in, give it a little water, and wait for your little bacteria friends to munch away and do their job. Soon they'll reward you with the dark, nutrient-rich compost that your garden needs.

**More Local Activities of Interest**

4-H Horsemanship Clinic; Ages: 9-19
July 22-23; Millstone 4-H Center in Ellerbe

The Horsemanship Clinic is designed to teach horsemanship skills that will enable youth to ride with more confidence and feel more competent working with their horse projects. The clinic is open to any North Carolina 4-H member at any riding level. Please make sure your horse is fit enough for 6-7 hours of riding instruction. Participants must bring their own horse, equipment, feed, and shavings. Horses are required to have a current, negative Coggins. The cost is $50 and includes meals. Call Elena Eller for more information at 947-3188.
What’s Bugging You?
By Alexis Pohlmeyer

If you haven’t seen them, you’ll soon be hearing them. Say hello to the latest brood of periodic cicadas—“The Great Southern Brood” or Brood XIX, to be more precise.

Unlike annual cicadas, these cicadas are called “periodic” because they only emerge once every 13 years. Due to their vast numbers upon appearing, they are often confused with locusts. However, locusts are actually a type of migratory grasshopper and not related to cicadas at all. They are members of the order Orthoptera while cicadas are in the order Homoptera.

It is believed periodic cicadas synchronize their life cycles so that they may overwhelm predators with their numbers. Once they have emerged, adults generally only live about six weeks.

Contrary to popular opinion, these cicadas are actually relatively harmless to plants. To humans, they really are simply just a nuisance.

See www.cicadamania.com for more information.

Great Food, Great Cooking in Moore County
By Judy Middaugh

The Moore County farmers markets are now offering a great array of fresh vegetables, fruit, honey and meat. Here are a few recipes that feature our county’s wonderful locally-grown produce.

Website: www.localharvest.org/moore-county-farmers-market

IDA’S CABBAGE & POTATOES
Peel and quarter four medium-large potatoes and boil in salted water. When potatoes are almost cooked, add 1/2 head sliced cabbage. Cook until done and drain in a colander. Separate cabbage and potatoes into two bowls and mash potatoes with a fork. Return empty pan to medium heat and add 2 Tbsp. olive oil and 1 clove minced garlic. Sauté until soft (approximately 1 minute). Return potatoes and cabbage to pan, add salt and pepper to taste and heat to desired temperature. Serve immediately. Yield: 4-6 servings.
(Source: Judy Middaugh, Moore County Master Gardener Volunteer)

FRESH TOMATO PIE
Preheat oven to 400°F. Bake a 9” pie crust 10-12 minutes, until golden. Cool on wire rack. Reduce oven temperature to 350°F. Sprinkle 3/4 cup shredded mozzarella cheese on bottom of cooled pie crust. Top with 3 or 4 thinly sliced medium tomatoes and arrange 1/3 cup thinly-sliced sweet onion evenly over tomatoes. In a small bowl, combine 1/2 cup reduced-calorie Caesar salad dressing, 3/4 cup shredded mozzarella cheese, 2 tsp. fresh chopped basil, 1/8 to 1/2 tsp. salt, and 1/8 tsp. of black pepper. Mix well and spoon over the tomatoes and onions. Bake 40 to 45 minutes until bubbly and golden brown. Yield: 8 servings.
(Source: Carole Van Cleave, Concord, NC)

LOUISE’S STRAWBERRY PIE
Prepare and bake a 9” deep-dish pie crust. Set aside to cool. Wash, stem and half 1 qt. fresh strawberries and place into the crust. Put 1 1/2 cups thawed, frozen strawberries (without added sugar or syrup) into a sauce pan. Add 1/4 cup sugar and 2 Tbsp. cornstarch and stir until dissolved. Cook over medium heat until the liquid is clear and thick. Pour mixture over the fresh berries and refrigerate for a few hours or until ready to serve. Top with whipped cream. Yield: 6-8 servings.
(Source: Susan Strine, Moore County Master Gardener Volunteer)

RADISH SALAD
Mix together 1/2 cup sliced radishes, 1 thinly-sliced carrot, 1 Tbsp. soy sauce, 1 Tbsp. apple cider vinegar, 1 tsp. brown sugar, 1 tsp. oil, and 1/2 tsp. hot pepper sauce (optional). Cover and marinate in refrigerator for at least 1 hour. Serve on a bed of lettuce. Yield: 2-4 servings.
(Source: www.cooks.com)

Strawberry
Radish
Tomato
Adult Periodic Cicada
Photo Courtesy Bruce Marlin
Cut dead and dying flowers from perennials. They will look better and some may even re-bloom.

Deadhead annuals to keep them blooming.

Cut back flowering bushes such as Indian hawthorne and azaleas after bloom is finished to control size and develop a more compact plant.

Continue to pinch back mums to promote a more robust plant.

Fertilize annuals, blueberries, gardenias, azaleas, and roses.

Watch for bagworms on junipers, whiteflies on gardenias, scale on camellias, and aphids on most everything.

To control bagworms, pull or cut the bags off limbs. To control aphids and whiteflies, spray your plants with an insecticidal soap.

Don’t miss our next edition due out July 1!

Additional copies of Dig This can be found at http://moore.ces.ncsu.edu/files/library/63/June%20MGV%202011.pdf

For more information on any of the topics covered herein, contact the MGV Information Hot Line: 910-947-3188

Disclaimer: Dig This has been produced by the Moore County Master Gardener Volunteers (MGV) in conjunction with the North Carolina Extension Service. Its purpose is to share with the general public some of the MGV’s enthusiasm for gardening and some of their activities. The information contained herein is based on sources that the Master Gardener Volunteers believe to be reliable, but they do not represent that that information is accurate or complete.