

Fall is almost here and it's about that time of the year to dust off the rakes and begin cleaning up all the leaves that fall from our trees. As we drive around we'll see people burning and bagging tons of leaves and sticks from their yards. It's always make me wonder, as I watch the smoke coming from these piles, if it's actually smoke signals trying to communicate to us that we are wasting a very valuable and free resource. It wouldn't take much effort at all to turn those leaves into nutrient filled compost to use in our gardens and flower beds.

Compost can improve aeration of soil, root penetration and water infiltration. It can make clay soils easier to work and helps sandy soils retain more water. Plus it's an environmentally sound practice in that it keeps the bags of leaves out of the landfill.

There are many different types of composters that can help you create this very valuable product. Of course there are composters that can be purchased from many home and garden centers, but for the true do-it-yourself person there are those that you can create yourself. The simplest and most inexpensive thing you can do is just make a pile in your backyard. This works well enough if you don't mind the appearance of an uncontained compost mound in your yard. Just find a good location and pile your yard waste in a mound about 3 feet X 3 feet X 3 feet. Then cover the pile with a layer of soil; it will keep moisture for the microorganisms and soil animals working to make compost.

It's best to have two piles. After the first pile is large enough, stop adding organic material and let it work. In the meantime, add your wastes to the second pile. Make sure the pile stays moist, especially if it is not covered with soil. You can turn the pile to speed composting. Compost should be ready in three to four months if a good compostable mixture of organic materials is used and the pile is turned regularly, or in about one year if you don't turn the pile.

I realize that many of you don't want to have just a pile of compost sitting in your backyard. You still can compost without having to go purchase the store brought composters. Composters can easily be made with items like an old trash can, cinder blocks, wire mesh, or wood.

One last thing, I've heard people complain that composting can have an offensive odor and that's why they don't make their own compost. Well, it can smell bad if you keep it too wet or add organic material that shouldn't go into the pile. So if you are interested in going "green" try composting. Just give me a call and I'll be glad to head you in the right direction, whether it's how to build your own, how to keep the pile from having an odor, or what should and shouldn't go into the pile.