

Composting

Courtesy of Rich and Carolyn Dahab

About twenty-five years ago Carolyn and I read a book by Mary Appelhof entitled *Worms Eat My Garbage*. It was a simple how-to book on under-the-kitchen-sink or in-the-backyard composting and it inspired me to build two 3 foot by 3 foot compost bins in our backyard. Over the past quarter of a century, they have consumed at least two tons (if not over three) of vegetable material producing many yards of compost and topsoil. Carolyn's parents, the Hitzig's, who lived on South Bay Avenue had been composting their vegetable kitchen waste and grass clippings for many years so the idea was not that original or far fetched. Her dad, Bill, simply dumped anything and everything in a back corner of his yard and ignored it.

To be honest, I have not been at all religious about turning over the piles or layering different kinds of materials as laid out in the book either, but the worms do not seem to notice all that much. Basically, we keep a miniature plastic garbage pail in the kitchen by the sink and collect coffee grounds, potato peelings, egg shells and so forth. Every day or two, one or the other of us put the material into one backyard bin until it is full and then start filling the other. By the time the second bin is full, the first one has composted enough that there is more room in it. You have to be careful not to put any animal materials into the pile except for egg shells and nature takes care of the rest of the process. In the summer we add yard debris like weeds that we have pulled out of the garden and all of the corn husks from the LI sweet corn we consume. Rarely, I use a shovel or pitch fork and pretend to turn the pile over. During all of these years, the system has worked flawlessly and has never created an odor or vermin problem.

Most of our village composting takes place at the Town facility behind MacArthur airport. Leaves and other garden products are picked up by the Village or carted off by gardeners and dropped off at the Holbrook site, an industrial facility capable of producing massive amounts of material very efficiently. The compost made there is available for residents to pick up and take home. Compost reintroduced into the soil works to capture carbon, hold moisture in our sandy soil, and promote growth in trees and other plants. Composting is a remarkably simple way of reducing global warming and beautifying the community.

Longtime residents (pre-sewers) probably remember the days before garbage disposals and plastic garbage bags to dispose of trash. Compost heaps were an effective way of reducing smells in the house and minimizing the weight and leakage from paper grocery bags. (Yuck) No one really thought about the ecology, composting simply was a necessity in warm weather. In fact, the only eco thoughts we had back then were about how much we hated using soap and not detergent to wash our clothes. Gray underwear

was the order of the day. Anyone with white underwear was wearing new clothes or was guilty of sneaking over to Nassau County to buy detergent.

Seriously, we do generate less trash because of our composting and we do get benefits for very little effort. I still love my compost heaps. They still are cooking away today and I plan on using them for the next twenty-five years.

There are many sources for information on composting. Here are a few Internet sources to get you started. The library will also have books on the subject.

<http://www.howtocompost.org/>

http://www.css.cornell.edu/compost/Composting_homepage.html

<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/FEATURE/backyard/compost.html>

<http://www.ciwmb.ca.gov/organics/Homecompost/>