

10 Reasons Why You Should Compost

1. Composting turns trash into treasure

Compost turns what would ordinarily be considered “garbage” into viable nutrients.

2. Composting builds soil

Composting plays a critical role in building healthy soil. This is extremely important given that the US loses about 3 tons of topsoil per acre annually (source). At this rate, we have roughly 60 years of topsoil left (source).

3. Composting cultivates healthy plants

Composting also fosters diverse life in soil, which supports healthy plant growth. Healthy plants are less susceptible to damage from pests, weather, and other natural “threats.”

4. Composting eliminates the “need” for chemicals

Adding healthy compost to the soil on farms and in gardens not only feeds the plants growing in this soil the nutrients they need, it also makes them stronger and more capable of resisting pests. In many situations, these nutrients are supplied synthetically using chemical fertilizers which are costly to our wallets and the environment. Here are some calculations I did using information from the USDA’s Economic Research Service on the use & prices of fertilizers (all numbers I’m using can be found on the page linked): In 2010 Minnesota (where I live) farmers used 125 pounds of nitrogen per acre of corn, on average. Other states used much higher amounts and some used lower amounts per acre of corn. We know that there are about 80 million acres planted in corn in the U.S. (source), so if we multiply 125 pounds by 80 million, this is 10 BILLION pounds of nitrogen, which is 5 million tons. The cost of nitrogen as of March 2012 was \$373/ton, so if we multiply \$373 by 5 million, we are spending {roughly} \$1,865,000,000 on nitrogen alone in this country. This is just one type of fertilizer used by industrial farms in one industry – corn. There’s still cotton, soybeans, and wheat, to name a few more crops that use chemicals in large quantities. Let’s not forget that fertilizers must mimic nature and cannot provide nitrogen alone to plants – other nutrients including potassium and phosphorous are needed. The point I’m making is that chemical fertilizers and pesticides are extremely expensive. Composting is basically free once the basic infrastructure and knowledge is there. AND it is much better for our plants, our earth, and us. I suppose I could just end here, but I’ve got 6 more to go :)

5. Composting diverts waste from landfills

Composting – if everyone did it! – could divert 36 million tons of food waste from landfills annually in the U.S. (source).

6. Composting saves money on garbage removal

It costs money to have trash removed. Especially for businesses like restaurants, composting can be a sound economic move (and would make them look pretty good, too!), as they generate a great deal of food waste that could be composted at a much lower cost than what it costs to dispose of it. Here’s an example of a neat service in New Hampshire that collects composts from restaurants, which saves one restaurant about \$150/month in garbage fees.

7. Composting conserves water

Healthy soil is a crucial mechanism in water retention. Compost encourages healthy, strong root systems in plants, which in turn holds water in and decreases run off. Side note: This lovely picture illustrates the ability for lawn to retain water (guess which one is Kentucky Blue Grass, one of the most popular types of lawn grass?) Okay, it is the one on the far left. The lesson is that lawn does not retain water very well, and contributes to run off. Grow food, not lawns! :)

8. Composting yields nutrient-rich food

Plants grown in healthy, nutrient-rich soil tend to have higher nutritional content than their counterparts grown in industrial soil. (source) If you believe you are what you eat, this is a pretty important piece of composting for human health.

9. Composting is simple!

Truly, it is! The hardest part is just getting going. All you really need to compost is: – Space – outside or inside (vermicomposting for inside; which is composting with worms in a bin) – Water – compost must stay fairly moist – Air – like all living things, compost needs air, as it is generating live microorganisms like bacteria, fungi, and actinomycetes – Carbon – brown stuff: dry leaves, straw, dead plant matter, wood chips, paper – Nitrogen – green stuff: kitchen waste like veggie scraps, egg shells, coffee grounds, and yard waste (be careful with weeds) – Time & Dedication I know that seems like a long list of 6 things, but most of them you already have laying around, so it just takes some synthesizing and that last component of time & dedication to really get going!

10. Composting is fun!

Integrating practices like composting into our lives is a great way to spend more time outdoors, connect with our food, and cooperate as a family. It may be work on one hand, but it can also be a fun practice! Also, composting is a gateway into gardening – and I can’t think of anything more fun!

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