



NEWS RELEASE

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State Health Department Encourages North Dakotans To Compost Yard Waste

BISMARCK, N.D. – International Compost Awareness Week (ICAW) is the largest and most comprehensive education initiative of the compost industry, according to the United States Composting Council. Moving forward from National Compost Awareness Week May 1 through May 7, 2011, the North Dakota Department of Health encourages residents to compost yard waste, support compost programs and use compost to enrich and fertilize soil, according to Steve Tillotson, manager of the department's Solid Waste Program.

Composting is the breakdown of organic materials by soil bacteria, producing humus or soil organic matter. Compost makes soil richer and better for plants. Potentially, anything that grows in your backyard is food for composting.

“Yard waste compost is nature’s best fertilizer and soil enhancer,” Tillotson said. “Composting yard waste recycles precious nutrients and organic matter, conserves fossil fuels used to produce fertilizer and saves landfill space. Plus, composting saves the work of bagging yard waste materials.”

Uses for compost include:

- Potting soil – Mix equal parts compost, sand and loam.
- Soil amendment – One month before planting, spread compost to a thickness of ½ inch to 3 inches over the garden and then mix into the top four inches of soil.
- Lawn top-dressing – Spread compost ¼ inch deep over lawn to reseed and rejuvenate.
- Moisture-holding mulch – Apply 2 inches to 3 inches around garden plants, shrubs and trees.
- Compost tea – Steep a shovel full of compost in a 5-gallon bucket for a few days to pour on plants.

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Like other living things, the organisms in a compost pile need water, air and a balanced diet – a mixture of green forage high in nitrogen (“greens”) and brown material high in carbon (“browns”).

Examples of “greens” include grass clippings, weeds, garden trimmings, dead house plants and potting mix. Examples of “browns” include leaves, twigs, pine needles, wood chips, straw and cornstalks, shredded newspaper, cardboard, paper towels, napkins and tissues. A properly operated compost pile does not generate odors and saves the homeowner from the chore of bagging bulky materials like leaves and grass clippings. Meat scraps, fats, etc., should not be added to compost piles; however, check with local officials to see if you can add vegetable and fruit scraps, bread, eggshells, tea bags and coffee grounds/filters.

Composting yard waste this spring and summer will result in material for your garden, lawn and landscaping needs this season and next. Follow these composting tips:

- Place compost in a corner of the yard in a bin or fenced area.
- Collect grass clippings, weeds and garden trimmings. Mowing chops up leaves and mixes in grass clippings, making a good compost medium.
- Place materials in layers, adding water to each layer. If the material becomes soggy, you’ve added too much water.
- Turn the material periodically to help add air; add water or more material as needed.
- If the compost is excessively wet, turn it and add more dead leaves, straw or newspaper to soak up the moisture.
- Vegetable matter from the kitchen can be composted in some areas; however, never place meat or grease into a compost pile as it may attract animals and may be more difficult to break down.

Many communities have compost programs for recycling grass and leaf materials. If you do not want to compost in your yard, you can support local compost programs. Take your yard waste to a local compost facility or drop-off site to help keep your community green.

To find local sources of compost or for a pamphlet on composting, contact your local solid waste program or the North Dakota Department of Health’s Solid Waste Program at 701.328.5166. Information also is available at www.ndhealth.gov. Information about National Compost Awareness Week can be found at the U.S. Composting Council’s website at www.compostingcouncil.org/programs/icaw.

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