

MultiFaith GROWS

Basic Winter Composting

Winter composting is a great strategy for jump starting the spring planting season. First you've already cleaned the beds up and most importantly the winter climate of thawing and freezing has contributed to the breaking down of the composted materials placed in the beds. Further, and most importantly, the beneficial bacteria and microbes in the soil have already had a chance to begin processing the organic material into easily accessible nutrients. As the soil warms up in the spring the nutrients are released and immediately available to your plants. Fertilizers and composted materials that are placed in the garden shortly before or at the time of spring planting can burn plants and must be processed by the soil microbes and bacteria first (usually taking 8 or so weeks) before the plant roots can begin absorbing them.

1. Prepare the garden beds anytime from Mid-October through early November (before the ground freezes)
 - i. Do all beds at once or do each bed after it has finished producing
 - ii. Remove all plant material (including leaf litter if plants were diseased)
 - iii. Remove all weeds
 - iv. Never put weeds or diseased plant parts in the composter
2. Loosen up the soil and place 2" to 3" of totally or partially composted material in the bed (just make sure it is relatively fine to medium –no big chunks)
 - a. Be sure to strike a balance between plant material, leaves, kitchen scraps and grounds to ensure the best nutrient mix and availability for your plants
 - i. Aged material from the compost pile (Black Gold)
 - ii. Coffee grounds
 - iii. Dried manure
 - a. Use the bagged manures (fresh or unprocessed manure usually has weed seeds in it. Cow manure typically has grass seed and horse manure typically has thistle seed.)
 - iv. A mix of different types of shredded leaves (use the lawn mower with the bag on)
3. The materials can be left as a top dressing or turned into the soil with a large garden fork
 - i. You may choose to machine till but understand this can upset or even destroy the microbial web and the soil structure that is most beneficial to plant life by inhibiting your garden's nutrient cycle.
 - ii. If you do till use the least amount of pressure and only work into the upper few inches of soil—do not till under weeds or diseased plants
4. Smooth out the surface and wet down the area