

The Grapevine

Starting a Compost Bin

With fall comes many outdoor activities such as cleaning the garden, raking up excess leaves, and possibly preserving the last of your fall produce. With all that plant material available, fall can be the perfect time to start a compost pile.

Compost is nature's way of transforming organic material into a form usable by plants. By definition, compost is a mix of soil and decomposed organic material broken down by bacteria, fungi, microorganisms, and air into nutrients that plants can use. Once the material has decomposed this organic material can be incorporated into vegetable gardens, as a thin layer in lawns, and used as mulch in flower beds. We create a compost pile using a combination of "brown" and "green" materials with beneficial decomposers, moisture, and air (more on that later). In nature, composting is a slow process but with the proper planning, composting can be a relatively quick process in the home garden.

The first step in starting a compost bin is figuring out where to put the bin. Compost piles need to stay damp to encourage faster decomposition, and the bin should not be in an area that stays consistently wet or holds water. It's best to put your compost pile in a location that is easy to access but not in the main area of the yard. Composting can be made in a pit, using a bin, or using a compost tumbler. How you compost will ultimately be up to your personal preferences and the amount of material you produce. Growing up we had a big compost pile that we threw organic material on that dad would turn it with a skid steer periodically to facilitate the breaking down of material. In a backyard, a compost pile should be in an enclosure to keep pets or wildlife out of the material. One of the cheapest bins you can make uses wooden pallets however, woven wire, cement bricks, or other lumber works just as well. You can purchase commercially made compost bins they are just expensive to purchase. Many people have multiple bins side by side and move the compost from one bin to another as it decomposes.

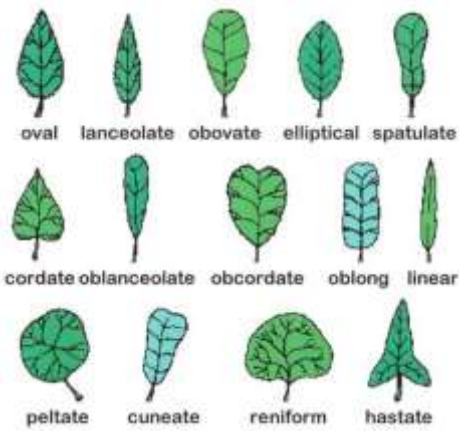


Once you have picked the location of your compost pile and built it it's time to start composting. Compost should consist of "brown" and "green" materials. Brown materials provide the carbon needed in the pile. These materials are usually dry, hence why we call them brown, and provide air movement and food for the decomposers to eat. Brown materials include leaves, straw, sawdust, dryer lint, pine needles, etc. A compost pile should have at least twice as many brown materials as green materials for effective decomposition. Green materials provide the nitrogen to feed the decomposers. They help the decomposers grow and multiply. These materials include grass clippings, kitchen waste (egg shells, peelings, scraps), flowers, coffee grounds, hair, manure, and weeds (without seeds). Some materials should not be used in a compost pile. These include disease or insect-infested plants, pet waste, meat or dairy products, weeds with seeds, and poisonous plants.

There are two methods of composting hot composting and cold composting. Hot composting is the fastest method, but you must have all of the materials needed to create a pile when you start. Cold composting takes longer but can be more user-friendly as you can add materials into the pile as you have them. To start a hot compost pile, collect all the materials and then follow this pattern:

- Start the pile with a six to eight-inch layer of brown materials on the bottom of the pile,
- Add a two to three-inch layer of green materials and repeat until you have a pile approximately three feet by three feet. If green materials are in short supply you can use manure or a high nitrogen fertilizer sprinkled throughout the pile to add the necessary food for the decomposers.
- Water the pile in well and keep it damp by watering it if there is no rain.
- Watch the temperature of the pile. The temperature should slowly rise to approximately 150-160 degrees stay at that temperature for some time and then slowly drop. Once it starts to cool down, turn the pile using a pitchfork. This should cause it to heat up again.

A hot compost pile should be ready in four to six months. Cold composting takes longer, up to a year however, you can add to the pile whenever you like. As you add to your cold compost pile, try to keep the brown-to-green ratio at 2 to 1 and turn the pile periodically to encourage decomposition. The compost is ready to use when there is no recognizable plant material, and the organic matter is dark brown and crumbly.



Leaf Shape

This week, we continue exploring plant identification with the shape of a leaf as an identifying factor. It is important to note that leaf shape may be influenced by environmental conditions damaging the leaf as the leaf is unfurling. I recommend comparing multiple leaves from the same plant and discarding any ones with an unusual shape. The leaf shape includes the apex or top of the leaf, the base of the leaf, and everything in between. Leaf shapes can range from **linear** (leaves narrow, four times longer than the width and have the same width) to **cordate** (heart-shaped) to **peltate** (leaves rounded with petiole attached under the leaf base). There are hundreds of different leaf shapes that have been identified by botanists but the photo to the left illustrates some of the common ones.

Prince of Orange Philodendron by Chris Stuhlsatz

The Philodendron 'Prince of Orange' is a houseplant that can be tough to find but would bring beautiful fall color to your houseplant collection! It's a popular and attractive cultivar of the Philodendron species. It is known for its vibrant, eye-catching foliage and is a favorite among indoor plant enthusiasts. Here are some key characteristics and care tips for the Philodendron 'Prince of Orange':

- **Foliage:** The 'Prince of Orange' gets its name from the striking color of its new leaves. When they emerge, they are a brilliant orange or copper color, which gradually darkens to a rich green as they mature. The leaves are typically heart-shaped and have a glossy appearance.
- **Growth Habit:** This Philodendron is a relatively compact plant, making it suitable for smaller spaces. It has a bushy growth habit and can be trained to climb if provided with a support structure.
- **Light Requirements:** 'Prince of Orange' Philodendrons thrive in bright, indirect light. They can tolerate some morning or late afternoon sun but should be protected from intense, direct sunlight, which can scorch the leaves.
- **Temperature:** This plant prefers warm temperatures and should be kept above 50°F (10°C). It's not suitable for outdoor planting in areas with cold winters.
- **Watering:** Like many Philodendron varieties, 'Prince of Orange' prefers to be kept evenly moist but not waterlogged. Water when the top inch of the soil feels dry, and reduce watering in the winter when growth slows down.
- **Humidity:** While not as demanding as some tropical plants, Philodendron 'Prince of Orange' benefits from increased humidity. Regular misting or placing a humidity tray nearby can help create a more suitable environment.
- **Soil:** Use a well-draining potting mix with good organic matter. A mix designed for aroids or a general-purpose houseplant soil can work well.
- **Fertilization:** During the growing season (spring and summer), feed your 'Prince of Orange' with a balanced, diluted liquid fertilizer every 4-6 weeks. Reduce or eliminate fertilization in the winter when growth slows down.
- **Pruning:** Regular pruning can help maintain a bushy and compact shape. You can also propagate new plants from cuttings.
- **Toxicity:** Like many Philodendrons, the 'Prince of Orange' is toxic if ingested, so it should be kept away from pets and small children.



This Philodendron cultivar is prized for its striking foliage and ease of care, making it a popular choice for indoor plant enthusiasts. With the right conditions and care, it can add a burst of color to your home or office space!



Reminders-

- Spray for winter annuals such as henbit and chickweed as well as dandelions in the lawn.
- Till or turn the soil of the garden to add organic matter and eliminate overwintering sites for insects.
- Plant spring flowering bulbs
- Plant garlic

Twice Baked Maple Pecan Sweet Potatoes

Ingredients

- 4 sweet potatoes
- ½ cup Greek yogurt, plain
- 2 tablespoons maple syrup
- ½ tablespoon pumpkin pie spice

Topping:

- ½ cup pecans, chopped
- 2 tablespoons butter/margarine
- 2 tablespoons brown sugar



Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 400 F. Pierce potatoes with fork and place in large baking pan. Bake for 20 to 35 minutes or until soft. Time will depend on size of sweet potatoes.
2. **Caution, potatoes will be hot.** Use a hot pad if necessary. Cut each potato lengthwise and scoop out flesh. Be careful not to tear potato skin. Place potato skins back in baking pan.
3. Mash flesh to smooth consistency. Combine the flesh, yogurt, syrup and pumpkin pie spice in a bowl. Mix well. Evenly distribute filling back into each potato skin.
4. In a small bowl combine pecans, butter and brown sugar. Use a fork to crumble the mixture together. Evenly distribute the topping onto each potato.
5. Bake potatoes at 400 F for 12 to 15 minutes. Serve with more syrup if desired. (Source: <https://www.ndsu.edu/agriculture/extension/recipes/twice-baked-maple-pecan-sweet-potatoes>)

Video of the week: Amaryllis for Winter Color

When you're thinking about plants for your home this winter, consider an Amaryllis. They're easy to grow, they're a lot of fun, and they provide a beautiful pop of color for your winter interior. Watch the video here:

<https://kansashealthyyards.org/all-videos/video/amaryllis-for-winter-color>

Upcoming Events

- *December 1st at 11 am- Winter Feeding of Birds*
Feeding the birds is a popular activity with over 59 million people in the United States feeding birds for well over 100 years. Join us for this class to learn some tips about what food to feed, ways to attract more birds to your home and some trouble shooting tips on why you aren't having birds at your feeders. This program is free at the Douglass Senior Center, 124 W 4th St, Douglass, KS 67039.
- *December 6th at Noon- Beekeeping Basics: How to Start Your own Colony*
Beekeeping is both popular and important for many reasons. Whether it's to produce your own local honey, supplement pollination of nearby plants, promote conservation, or even personal entertainment, there are many reasons to become a beekeeper. Join Ryan Engel, Golden Prairie District Horticulture Extension Agent, as he covers the equipment you will need, how to source your bees, and what it takes to establish a new colony. This class is offered online via Zoom. For more information on the Garden Hour series or to register visit here: <https://hnr.k-state.edu/extension/consumer-horticulture/garden-hour/>
- *December 7th at 6 pm- Winter Feeding of Birds*
Feeding the birds is a popular activity with over 59 million people in the United States feeding birds for well over 100 years. Join us for this class to learn some tips about what food to feed, ways to attract more birds to your home and some trouble shooting tips on why you aren't having birds at your feeders. This program is free at the Bradford Memorial Library, 611 S Washington St. El Dorado, KS.

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Calla Edwards- KSRE Horticulture Agent
206 N Griffith St. El Dorado, KS 67042
316-321-9660
callae@ksu.edu

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