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Biodiversity for a Livable Climate

Restoring Ecosystems to Reverse Global Warming

June 24, 2015

Urban Eco-Restoration Series

Part 1: Composting for Your Garden

Photo by Modern Farmer

Here at Biodiversity for a Livable Climate, we are huge advocates of organic at-home gardening for all of its carbon-sequestering, oxygen-promoting, and flood-reducing potential. Not to mention the joy and pleasures of eating delicious food you grew yourself. Starting a garden can be an intimidating undertaking for some, so we are creating a newsletter series to highlight some of the incredibly simple and highly-rewarding techniques that you can use in your urban (or

Featured Event

Tufts Fall 2015 Climate Conference: Restoring Water Cycles to Reverse Global Warming

non-urban) green space. In nurturing your garden, you are bolstering the carbon-sequestering capacity of your soil and contributing to a more nutrient-dense, biodiverse food system.

For the first installment, here is an overview of some of the common composting techniques to build nutrients in your soil-and thus enhance the flavor and nutritional value of your fruits and vegetables.

Photo by Mother Nature News

The r atio of organic materials to keep in mind: 8 parts "brown" matter, to 3 parts "green" matter, to 1 part soil.

- Brown matter helps to aerate and provide carbon for the compost. Examples of brown matter include dry leaves, untreated wood chips, straw, sawdust, spent hay, cardboard, and newspaper.
- Green matter supplies the nitrogen and nutrients your garden needs. Examples of green matter include food scraps, grass clippings, coffee grounds, egg shells, and manure.

In this conference we will focus on water's role in regulating climate through its capacity to store, move and transfer more heat than any other natural compound.

Sponsored by the Tufts Institute of the Environment.

RSVP

When

Friday, October 16, 2015, 5:30 PM - Sunday, October 18, 2015 5:00 PM (EDT).

Where

Tufts University, Medford, MA.

Fees

$150 sliding scale

For more information visit here and Register now on Eventbrite!

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Jim Laurie's Talk on

Photo by Mother Earth News

1. Basic compost pit: The basic compost pit is the simplest, most straight-to-the-garden way to incorporate compost directly into your yard. Simply find a well-drained area in your yard. Clear it thoroughly, possibly digging down a few inches, and then create layers of green and brown matter, starting with a 6-inch layer of brown matter followed by a 2-3 inch layer of green matter. Water each layer until it's moist, then repeat the layering process until you have used up your compost. Keep adding as you acquire more green and brown materials.

- Tip: The more frequently you turn your compost, the faster the organic material will break down into finished compost. It should take anywhere between two months and a year to break down, depending on the materials you've included and how frequently you turn or mix the pile. Keep it moist but not wet, similar in consistency to a wrung-out sponge.

2. In-vessel composting: For this technique, you place the organic matter in a drum, silo, or bin-possibly one with a mechanism that turns the compost to aerate it. These vessels vary in size, making them appropriate for individual homes, businesses, schools, etc. With a solid composter you can add materials year-round in most climates, even in extremely cold weather if the vessel is properly insulated.

Microbes

In case you missed our "Microbes 'R' Us" discussion and potluck, you can watch a video on restoration ecologist Jim Laurie's talk on microbes:

Microbes 'R' Us

For additional resources, including presentation slides, recommended book list, and more visit the event page here. We hope to see you at our next Meetup!

About BLC

Our mission at Biodiversity for a Livable Climate is to mobilize the biosphere to restore ecosystems and reverse climate change. Our primary project is to re-direct the mainstream climate conversation from an almost exclusive concern with atmospheric carbon to encompass the entire carbon and water cycles and the regenerative role of biology.

Learn more about our ongoing projects, upcoming events and find additional information and resources at bio4climate.org.

Photo by the Gardens Project

3. Sheet composting: This is another no-bin technique, in which you spread multiple thin layers of organic matter on top of the soil, let it rest (lie fallow) for a while, and then till it before you plant. Also known as sheet mulching or "lasagna composting," sheet composting involves covering the soil with a layer of cardboard or newspaper, then adding a layer of compost, followed by a layer of organic brown material. While it can be a slower approach to building soil organic matter, sheet mulching is a great approach for an empty unproductive area.

Photo by Sustainable Lafayette

4. Vermicomposting:
Red wiggler earthworms (also called tiger worms) will break down organic matter and produce nutrient-rich castings. They feed on food scraps, shredded paper, coffee grounds, etc. and transform the scraps into highly fertile manure. You can start with any sort of lidded plastic container: punch several holes in the lid so the worms can breathe. Shred old newspaper and dampen it slightly, then put the worms in the container with a handful of food scraps and the

cover with the shredded paper. The key here is to feed the worms enough, but not too much that they can't keep up, and keep the worm bin between 50 and 75 degrees F for ideal worm living conditions.

Photo by Urban Worm Composting

If you are choosing an outdoor compost system, be sure to choose a location that has an accessible water source and a fair amount of sunlight.

Building and incorporating compost into your garden
can be both simple and highly gratifying. Even if you live in a small apartment with little to no green space, you can produce compost for a neighbor, community garden, or urban food non-profit. Happy composting!

To learn more about composting, visit these resources:

Sheet Composting: "The Secret to Converting Lawn to Garden"

Vermicomposting: "A Step-by-Step Guide to Vermicomposting"

General tips from the city of Cambridge