

## Create A Compost Pile For Your Garden

**Use leftovers and food scraps from you and your bird to make your compost pile.**

*By Susan Chamberlain*

Courtesy Mark & Marsha Fractor, California

Use some of your leftover fruit and vegetable scraps from your birds to create layers in your compost pile.

In "Get Gardening!" (Your Bird, Your World, BIRD TALK Oct. 08) you got tips on how to start planning an organic garden for you and your birds. Now, learn how to make your own compost pile.

Composting is the ultimate in recycling and a great way to make a rich additive to your garden soil. Use biodegradable-, chemical-, toxin- and disease-free yard and kitchen waste to create high-quality soil for your garden.

Locate your composting area away from trees and shrubs because the roots may invade the rich soil. The enclosure should be about 3 feet in diameter and 3 feet high. Remove grass from the area within your compost bin, leaving an area of clean soil. Now you can begin composting. Start with a layer several inches high of shredded autumn leaves, straw or other brown material. Add a layer of pesticide- and chemical-free grass clippings followed by household scraps, such as fruit and vegetable matter (scrapings and leftovers from you or your birds), coffee grounds and eggshells. Manure from chickens, horses and pet rabbits can also be composted (avoid using fresh cow manure because of the possibility of the presence of E-coli).

Repeat the layering process several times if you have sufficient material, or simply add it as it becomes available. Water lightly and turn your compost pile periodically. The center of the pile will begin to heat up as the material decomposes. When the material in your compost bin has turned into dark, crumbly soil, you can add it to your garden.

Seed-free weeds, cornstalks and other garden plant matter and straw can be used in compost piles, but never add diseased plants, meat or dairy products, treated wood or glossy paper to your pile. Black-and-white newspaper can be shredded and added to compost, but it might be more useful as mulch. It is biodegradable, helps hold moisture in the soil and prevents weeds from sprouting. Put several layers of newspaper down on the soil between the plants, wet it, and weigh it down with pesticide- and herbicide-free grass clippings, peat moss or compost.

For more information on how to begin an organic garden, check out the October 2008 issue of BIRD TALK magazine.