

Don't discard clippings —make a compost pile

Don't throw away those grass clippings, and potato peelings. Make a compost pile; your garden will love you for it.

Soil from a compost pile is exceedingly high in humus content and rich in plant nutrients.

Use it as a top dressing for lawns or improve the soil texture in your flower and vegetable gardens. Compost is also valuable as potting soil for houseplants and in the preparation of seed flats.

Building a compost pile is simple, says Mike Bladon of the University of Guelph's grounds department.

Choose a partially shaded location to maintain a more even degree of moisture in the compost pile and protect from the coldest winds.

Most important, choose a site that is easily accessible; not much household waste is going to be composted if you have to walk through wet grass or climb a snowbank.

Be sure the location is well drained. On a waterlogged site, a different type of decomposition can take place that causes foul-smelling gases. Dig the area over well or pave it with patio slabs spaced to leave drainage channels.

You can construct a wooden container or build your compost pile of a convenient, workable size, about 122 centimetres to 183 centimetres (four to six feet) wide, and 81 cm to 122 cm (three ft. to four ft.) high and of any desired length.

Use a coarse material such as inverted sod or weed stalks at the base. Then alternate layers of organic refuse and soil. Almost any organic material, including animal manure if available, can be used. Avoid very woody materials and diseased plants.

Make the top of the pile concave to catch as much rain as possible. If you use dry materials such as hay or straw, soak the pile thoroughly as you are building the pile.

Occasionally add a sprinkling of ground limestone (available at garden centres) to the pile as you build it to reduce acid conditions which can impede decomposition.

Keep the compost moist but not wet. Once a month, turn the pile, rebuilding so that the outer portion is placed in the centre of the pile.

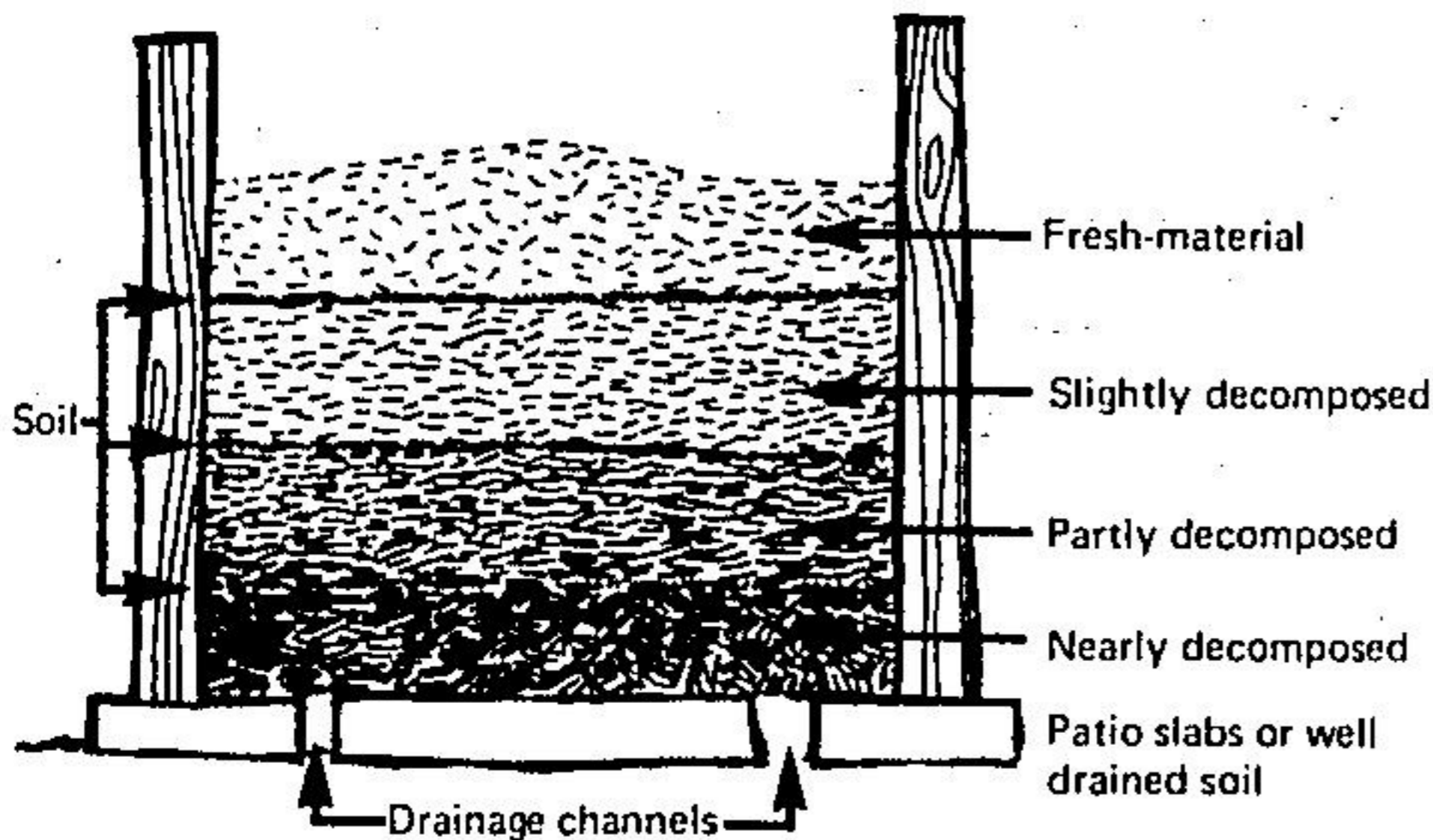
Breakdown of organic matter occurs as the heat in the pile increases from zero degrees Celsius to 35 degrees Celsius (32 degrees Fahrenheit to 95 degrees Fahrenheit).

During winter months cover the pile with clear plastic to allow sunlight to heat the pile and prolong decomposition. Remove plastic occasionally to allow air into the compost pile.

Time required to convert raw organic materials into a good humus suitable for garden use depends on a number of factors, such as climatic conditions, moisture content of the pile, type and size of materials used and whether or not a commercial activator to speed decomposition is used.

Bacterial action is more rapid in warm climates than in colder regions, green materials decompose more rapidly than more woody materials and smaller materials break down faster than larger ones.

Use of some commercial activators can also speed the process of decomposition to such an extent that it is possible to obtain an excellent humus in three to four months. These are available at local gardening centres.



Win lawn weed battle

Win the weed battle in your lawn this year through good lawn management, says Horticulturist Jack Eggers of the University of Guelph's horticultural science department.

Most weed seeds require light for germination. In a thick lawn insufficient light at the soil level prevents or reduces weed seed germination.

To produce a thick lawn, avoid mowing lower than four centimetres to five centimetres in height (1.5 inches to two inches). Mow every six to eight days during good growing weather and return the clippings to the lawn to mulch.

Apply a 4-1-2 ratio fertilizer at the rate of 1.5 kilograms to 2.0 kilograms nitrogen per 100 square metres per growing season (three pounds to four pounds per 1,000 square feet).

Apply about two cm (0.78 in.) of water at seven to 10 days. Avoid sprinkling the lawn because this provides a moist seed bed for weed germination.

To kill weeds effectively, they must be actively growing so that the herbicide is taken up quickly. Herbicides should not be applied during drought or high temperature stress.

Most broadleaf weeds can be selectively removed with post-emergence herbicides. Dandelion and plantain are killed by 2,4-D. Mecoprop is effective for controlling clover and black medic; Diacamba will control 2,4-D-resistant weeds such as prostrate knotweed.

Often two or three herbicides are included together to provide broad spectrum weed control.



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