

Home & Garden

Complement composting with food disposer

You can improve your garden and the environment by pairing composting and a food waste disposer to create an effective home waste-management system.

Food waste disposers are the natural complement to composting. In fact, when used in conjunction with composting and recycling, disposers can create an effective home waste-management system, allowing for a minimal amount of waste to enter the local waste stream.

Disposers effectively and conveniently eliminate those food wastes which, experts say, should be avoided in backyard composts. These include meat and fish scraps, dairy products and oily and fatty foods, because they can attract pests and putrefy in poorly maintained composting systems.

Slow or cold composting is the simplest method because it requires minimal work and can be an open pile with new material simply added to the top. It is not advised for composting food scraps, however. Since wastes degrade slowly unless they are mixed and aerated, this method is recommended instead for composting yard trimmings. Finished compost is not usually produced for up to two years.

Producing finished compost in as little as six weeks, the fast or hot composting method requires that materials be composted in the correct carbon and nitrogen proportions. Due to microbial activity, a properly constructed hot compost pile will heat up rapidly. It requires frequent mixing to aerate the pile and control

its moisture content. Food scraps should be buried in the central and hottest portion of the pile, rather than just thrown on top. Unless it is meticulously constructed and maintained, a hot pile can revert to a much slower composting system with the possibility of offensive odors and unwanted pests. Food waste disposers can be a big help to homeowners in creating a manageable home waste-management system, since they eliminate all types of biodegradable organic food wastes, including those that can't be composted.

Extending the vase life of freshly cut flowers

Some simple practices can almost double the amount of time fresh-cut flowers will look attractive.

1. The most important step after bringing flowers home is to recut the stems about one inch from the bottom, making an angled cut with a clean, sharp knife.

2. Remove all the lower foliage from the stem, which will prevent bacteria from building up in the water.

3. Fill a container with warm water, which contains fewer air bubbles than cold water. Air bubbles can get trapped in stems and block the uptake of water to the upper foliage and the flower. Warm water also works best to thoroughly dissolve floral preservatives.

4. Add a floral preservative to the water. Preservatives contain substances that prevent bacteria from forming in the vase water and provide an energy source to assure long-lasting full blooms.

Preservatives

Commercial floral preservatives are commonly available at most flower shops. Two common brands are "Florever" and "Chrysal." Add the mixture to water according to package directions.

Homemade preservatives work about as well as commercial brands. Try equal amounts of warm water with lemonade, or a lemon-lime soft drink, mixed with a teaspoon of chlorine bleach. Make enough of the mixture to cover at least the lower three to four inches of the stems where the foliage has been removed.

Because the flower can no longer produce its own carbohydrate food sources, the sugar acts as an alternative energy source. The lemon or lime in the soda provides citric acid, which acts as a preservative, and the bleach prevents bacteria from forming in the water. This mixture will also help flowers bloom if buds are not fully opened.

Placement

Place containers with flowers in a cool well-lit area. Don't put them in direct sunlight or near heaters or air-conditioning vents because drafts will dehydrate the flowers. Keep them away from ripening fruits or vegetables - the ethylene gas they release speeds the decline of fresh cut flowers.

If a preservative has not been used, change the water every two days, and recut the stems. With a preservative, recut the stems and change the water every four or five days.

Flower arrangements in florist foam bricks should be watered every day so the foam does not dry out.

Roses and Tropical Flowers
Certain kinds of fresh flowers will require special care, including roses and tropical flowers like orchids, anthuriums, heliconias and streptolias.

Roses are very susceptible to air bubbles lodging in their stems. The bent necks that result from this can be prevented by cutting the stems under warm water. Make an angled cut with a clean, sharp knife. Don't crush the end of the stems, as this can greatly decrease vase life. Thorns may be removed as long as you don't injure the stems.

Tropical fresh flowers, including orchids and most corsages, do best if frequently misted with water. They prefer higher humidity levels and

should be kept away from air-conditioning and heating units to limit moisture loss.

If orchids or other flowers in a corsage appear to be limp after bringing them home, recut the stems and place the entire flower under warm water for one hour.

If corsages are not immediately used, place them in a container of water in the refrigerator. Refrigeration helps preserve freshness only if moisture is also available. Orchids and other tropicals are also particularly sensitive to the deteriorating effects of ethylene gas.



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