

How to start composting for your garden

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Ecological experts have proposed countless ways to improve the environment, but something as simple as changing the way you dispose of your trash could have a significant impact on the future of our planet.

By composting biodegradable materials, such as yard trimmings, food waste and disposable paper products in a pile or bin, a nutrient-rich soil is created that can be used for gardening. This soil reduces the need for chemical fertilizers and pesticides, is better for the environment and will save you money. It also promotes healthy foliage and growth -- a boon to gardeners everywhere.

"Few Americans realize that nearly 50 percent of the waste from their home is compostable," says Eric Happell, Director of Fiber Business Unit at Huhtamaki, the makers of Chinet paper products. "If every American household composted, we could reduce our solid waste stream by more than 60 percent."

Here's a step-by-step guide to starting a composting pile at home:

- * Select a convenient spot for composting. This spot can either be indoors in a compost bin or outdoors in a semi-shaded and well-drained area. Don't put your compost pile under acid producing trees like pines.
- * Combine organic wastes such as yard trimmings, food scraps and biodegradable products into a pile, then add bulking agents such as wood chips to accelerate the breakdown of organic materials.
- * Let nature take its course. Typical compost will turn into rich soil in two to five weeks.

A properly managed compost bin or pile will not attract pests or rodents and will not smell bad. Therefore, make sure you know what you can and cannot add to a compost pile.

Many everyday items can be used, including fruits and vegetables, yard trimmings, eggshells, coffee grounds, teabags, and certain paper products. For example, Chinet's Classic White and

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Casuals lines of paper plates are 100 percent biodegradable and endorsed by the U.S. Composting Council. You can also add dryer and vacuum cleaner lint, pet fur and fireplace ashes.

Other biodegradable materials, like hay, straw, grass clippings, saw dust and leaves can also be added to compost piles, with the exception of black walnut leaves, which release chemicals that are harmful to plants. Also, don't include diseased or insect-ridden plants, or plants treated with chemicals or pesticides; these, too, will make the compost harmful or toxic.

Be sure to avoid adding food and organic matter that will make the compost pile smell, such as dairy products, egg yolks (whites are okay), fats, grease, lard and oils. Meat and fish scraps are compostable, but make sure they do not contain parasites or bacteria.

For more tips on composting and other environmental activities, visit www.mychinnet.com and click on "Environment."

"The average American produces four pounds of landfill waste daily," says Happell.
"Composting is a simple solution to reducing your family's ecological footprint."