

The Dirty Job of Compost

Exhibitor: Josh Feyen

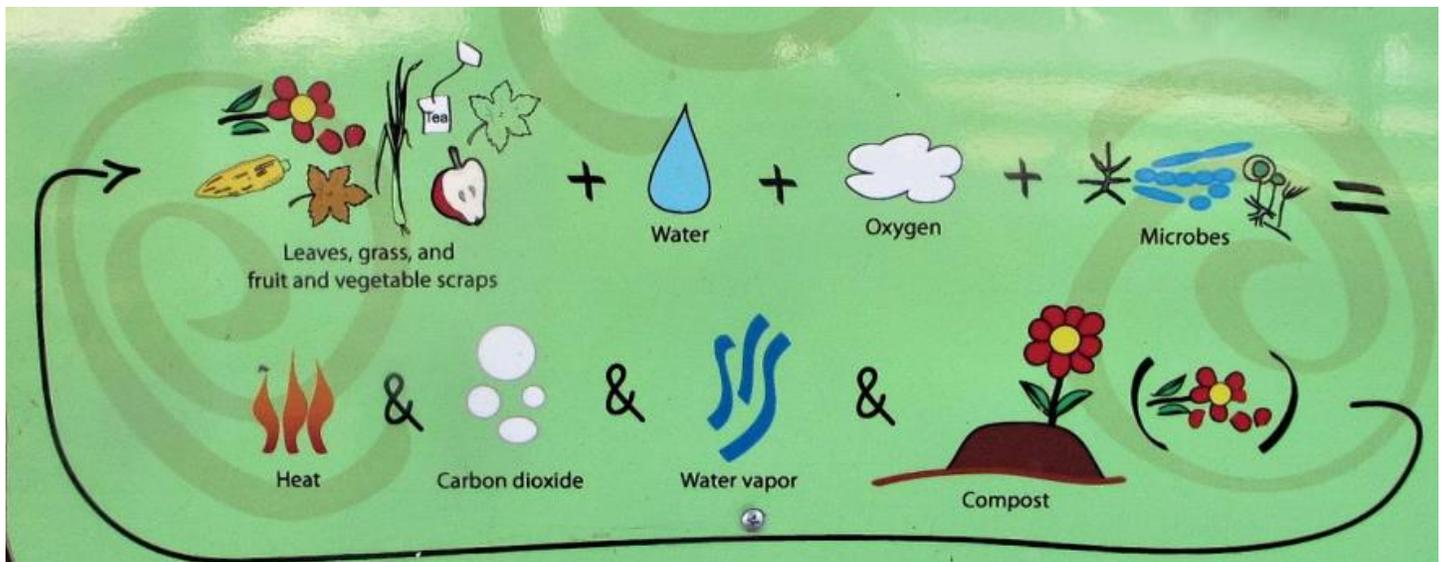
This exhibit is dedicated to generous Little Free Museum supporters George and Patti Peters.

Try It Out

What is compost made of? Have you ever stopped to take a closer look? Grab a handful from the container labeled "Compost." Don't worry, it's not gross or smelly or disgusting! And you can wipe your hands with the towel. What do you see and smell? Next, can you guess what's in the other two containers?

What's Going On?

In the "Compost" container you might notice broken down leaves, coffee grounds and lots of black and brown stuff so small you can't tell what it is. This is humus, which forms naturally on forest floors when soil microorganisms break down fallen leaves, wood, and even dead bugs and animals. In our yards, we can make the same thing happen using leftovers from our kitchen and other organic materials! This compost was made in the back yard next door with leaves from this block and coffee grounds from local cafes.



Why It Matters

Compost is amazing. It holds lots of water which is good for plants. It contains nutrients that plants need to grow strong (and to feed us if we eat them). It protects the soil underneath from drying out and prevents wind and water erosion. Compost also keeps soil loose, which allows air and water to penetrate the soil and maintain healthy plant roots. Finally, composting in your yard keeps leaves out of Madison's beautiful lakes; leaves are a significant contributor to lake pollution.



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When you get home

You can make compost now to add to your garden next spring, where it will help annual vegetables, perennial plants, trees and shrubs.

1. When leaves fall to the ground, collect them and make a big pile.
2. If you can, run over them with a lawn mower to shred them into small pieces.
3. Ask your local coffee shop for some coffee grounds. They WANT to get rid of them! Don't worry if the grounds come with filters—they'll break down with the leaves!
4. For every garbage bag of shredded leaves (carbon), you will need a 5-gallon bucket of coffee grounds (nitrogen).
5. Layer leaves and grounds to form a compost "lasagna" in a bin.
6. Water your lasagna every week until it is as wet as a wrung-out kitchen sponge.
7. You can hasten the process by emptying the bin to turn and mix the compost. Do this once in late autumn and once when the pile thaws in the spring.
8. By next spring, you'll have your own compost to add to your garden.