CONSIDERATIONS WHETHER OR NOT TO START COMPOSTING

Before starting with composting it is important to decide whether it is worthwhile, and it is usually very subjective. Of course, the working conditions discussed in this booklet should be satisfied as far as it is possible. These are easy to check but apart from these, personal and socio-economic factors play a role too. Relevant questions in relation to these factors are:

- is it necessary to use compost?;
- how is the introduction of composting experienced as a new method?;
- how much motivation, energy and time can [be devoted], and is one prepared to put into composting?;
- are there taboos, customs and other cultural factors which make the use of compost difficult?

All these and other aspects have to be considered. It is therefore very advisable to discuss matters before making a start. Finally, in many cases, composting is a good supplement to the usual manuring practice, but it is by far not always the ideal situation. The following questions can serve as a guideline in deciding whether or not to start composting:

- is there enough knowledge about the composting process?;
- where should the heap be setup?;
- how big can/may the heap be?;
- how much organic material is available?;
- is there a regular supply of organic material?;
- what is the quality of the organic material?;
- who is going to do the work?;
- how much time can be spent on it?;
- at times when much organic material is available, is there time to use it?;
- how much compost should or can be produced?;
- what is the compost to be used for?;
- are there cheaper and easier alternatives, such as green manuring?;
- are there any taboos or other cultural socio-economic aspects which make it difficult to use certain types of organic material or compost?

Having taken the decision, take time to experiment, and give the first experimental heap time too. Things will probably not go as well as they should the first time, but in this way it is possible to discover the ideal method in your specific situation. Do not expect wonders from the compost though.

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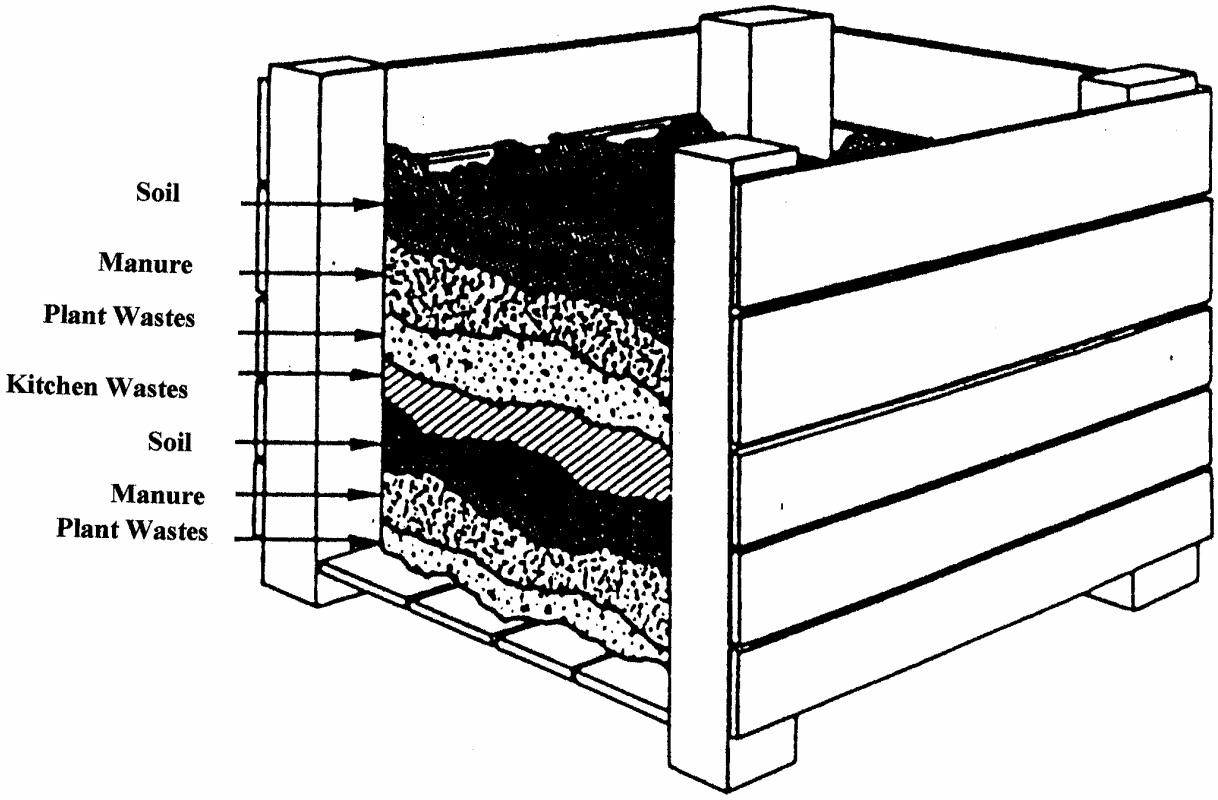

SIMPLE OUTDOOR COMPOSTING

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Legend for "Simple Outdoor Composting" Figure.

Material	Rate of Decomposition	Remarks
Wood Ash		Rich in sodium and calcium. Don't add carbon or other ash.
Dried Blood	1	Don't add too much
Cabbage Stalks	4	First chop into small pieces with spade or hammer.
Comfrey leaves (*Symphytum officinale*)	1-2	Contains sodium.
Grass cuttings	1	
Hay	3	First cut into small pieces and moisten; also suitable as mulch.
Kitchen waste	2-3	Remove meat scraps to safeguard against rats.
Dead leaves	4	A separate heap for leaves only is preferable.
Horse manure (with straw)	2-3	Also suitable as manure as it is.
Bird droppings (without straw)	1	Not suitable for direct use in garden. Good activator for straw and other woody material which is not easily decomposable.
Stinging nettles	1	Rich in minerals (especially nitrogen)
Newspaper		Avoid if possible. Otherwise tear up into small pieces; printing ink is toxic.
Potato leaves	2	
Green leaves	3	Litter from bush clearing, e.g.
Woody leaves	4-5	First crush up
Saw dust	5	Only small amounts to be used.
Seaweed	1-2	Contains alginates which activate microorganisms
Straw	3-4	Old material cut up in small pieces is best. Moisten well before use if it is dry.
Urine	1	A good source of nitrogen and sodium. If nitrogen is lacking in the heap, use a solution of 1 part urine to 3 parts of water.
Herbs	1-2	Could have either a stimulating or toxic and inhibiting effect.

1 - material decomposes very quickly (activator)
2 - material is already of good composition for easy decomposition; no activator required
3,4 - material has to be mixed with material with rate of decomposition numbers 1 and 2
5 - avoid using this on the compost heap if possible
- not applicable

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