

Horticulture

Answers to composting questions

What kinds of materials can be composted?

Yard and garden residues and other organic materials are suitable for composting. This includes leaves, grass clippings, straw, hay, sawdust and finely chopped or shredded tree and shrub prunings.

Can kitchen scraps be added to a compost pile?

Certain kitchen scraps can be added to the compost pile, such as fruit and vegetable trimmings, coffee grounds and eggshells. Bury them in the pile to prevent odors and flies. Do not add meat scraps, bones, grease, whole eggs or dairy products to the compost pile because they are slow to decompose, will cause odors and can attract rodents.

What is the optimum size for a compost pile?

The best size of an enclosed compost pile is 3' x 3' x 3'. If too small, it will dry out fast; if too large it will have poor air circulation and will be difficult to turn the pile.

How can I avoid problems with unpleasant odors from the compost pile?

Odors may arise either from the addition of excessive amounts of wet plant materials like fruits or grass clippings, overwatering the pile or not turning an actively decomposing pile periodically. A properly prepared and adequately turned compost heap will generate little, if any, objectionable odor. Good aeration, provided by regularly turning over the materials in the pile, is essential for good, rapid decomposition.



Also, keeping the compost damp, but not waterlogged, will go along way towards preventing unpleasant odors.

How long does it take to reach a finished product?

Generally, a compost pile that contains a good mixture of finely chopped materials, is turned regularly and kept moist, will be ready in 2 to 4 months. A pile or bin left unattended or material not shredded may take a year or longer to decompose. Piles prepared in the late fall will not be very well decomposed by the spring. When the compost is finished the pile will be about half its original size and have a pleasant, earthy smell.

Of what value or use is the finished compost product?

Compost is used as an organic amendment to improve the physical, chemical and biological properties of the soils. For example, adding compost to garden soil will increase the moisture holding ability of sandy soils and improve the drainage and aeration of heavy clay soils. Over time, yearly additions of compost will create desirable soil structure making the soil easier to work. (MJM)

What do they like to eat?

Are there certain birds you would like to attract to your urban landscape or acreage? You can do this by providing the foods they prefer to eat.



Cardinal: autumn-olive, dogwood, corn, sunflower, various berries.



Blue jay: acorns, cherry, sunflower, wild plum, cultivated grains.



Black-capped chickadee: sunflower, conifer tree seeds, blackberry, various berries.



American goldfinch: goldenrod, sunflower, mulberry, thistle seed, annual flower seeds.



Junco: millet, wheat, sunflower, grass seed. (MJM)

Needle drop on evergreens

Contrary to popular belief, evergreens do not keep their needles indefinitely. Older, inner needles, discolor and drop off after one to several years, depending on the evergreen in question.

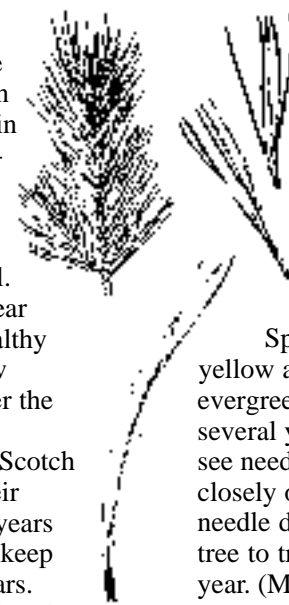
Sometimes the drop occurs slowly. On other occasions, many needles may turn yellow all at once in late summer or fall. Because weather triggers the condition, many evergreens are likely to show symptoms in the fall. If you are not familiar with this natural process, it could cause you a great deal of concern. Each species of evergreens usually keeps its needles for a definite length of time.

White pines are the most

dramatically affected. They usually keep three years of needles in summer and two in winter. The three-year old white pine needles turn yellow throughout the tree in fall. The tree will appear particularly unhealthy when these yellow needles outnumber the green ones.

Austrian and Scotch pine also keep their needles for three years and Norway pine keep theirs for four years.

Needles on arborvitae,



usually turn brown rather than yellow when they age. They often remain attached much longer than mature pine needles.

Japanese yew needles turn yellow and drop in late spring or early summer of their third year.

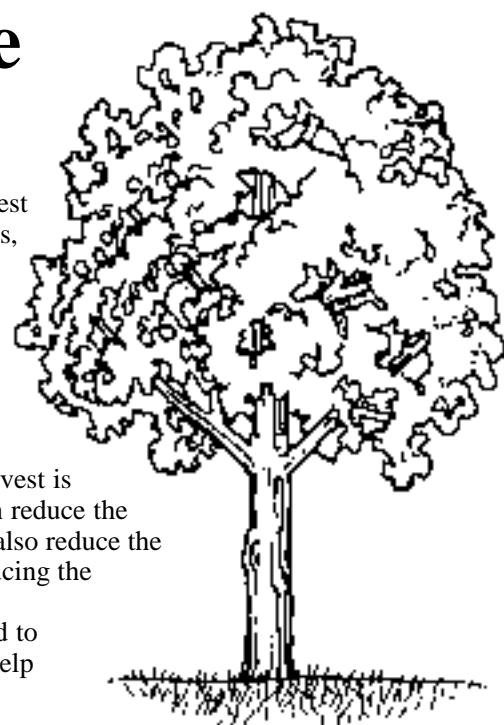
Spruce and fir needles also yellow and drop with age. These evergreens retain needles for several years, so you may not see needle drop unless you look closely on inner branches. These needle drop patterns vary from tree to tree and from year to year. (MJM)

Fall clean up in the orchard

Care for the home orchard does not stop when the harvest ends. A critical part of the pest control program remains, the fall orchard clean up. Cleaning up fallen fruits and leaves eliminates many insect pests and disease organisms that would overwinter in the orchard. They could be a problem for next year's growing season.

Clean up is not strictly a fall chore. Fruits that drop and diseased leaves that fall at any time during the growing season should be cleaned up as soon as possible. The major clean up occurs in the fall after harvest is over and trees have lost their leaves. A fall clean up can reduce the incidence of fungal diseases, such as apple scab. It can also reduce the pressure on trees by pests such as apple maggot by reducing the overwintering population of insects.

A fall clean up probably will not eliminate the need to use pesticides to control these problems, but it should help make chemical controls more effective. (MJM)



1999 October/November Garden Calendar

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
					1	2
3	4	5 Pick last apples and pears	6 Pick squash, pumpkins and gourds before frost	7	8	9
10	11	12	13 Plant spring flowering bulbs	14 Fertilize tall fescue	15 Fertilize bluegrass	16
17	18 Clean up garden	19	20 Rake and compost leaves	21	22	23
24	25	26	27 Clean up perennial flower beds	28 Prune and mulch roses	29 Put up bird feeders	30
31	1 Clean up fallen fruit	2 Mulch perennial plants	3 Clean, repair and organize garden tools	4	5 Organize garden supplies	6
7	8	9	10	11 Make wish list for next year	12	13
14	15	16	17 Pick bag worms from evergreens	18	19	20
21	22	23 Check house plants for insects	24	25	26	27
28	29	30 Check all stored bulbs and tubers for rot				

Many of us need reminders. That is the purpose of this calendar. Check the calendar each month and follow the recommendations if they are necessary in your landscape situation. (MJM)