

# Arlington

## MASTER COMPOSTERS

Forty-Fifth Edition

March 2005

The **MASTER COMPOSTER** Program of Arlington is in partnership with Texas to dramatically decrease yard and household waste going to landfills by inspiring and educating our citizens to reduce, recycle, and reuse.

### House & Organic Gardening Show with Howard Garrett

The House and Organic Gardening Show with Howard Garrett was January 7 – 9 at the Arlington Convention Center. Thank you to all the folks listed below who helped make the weekend a success. Our booth was outstanding this year due to all the hard work of our volunteers AND to Nancy Hagwood's idea to have cute little attention-getting bunny rabbits on hand to get folks to stop at our booth.

Maxine Delzer, Ray & Ginny Buckingham, Kathy Cermek, Hugh Ross, Don Graves, Stephen and Cyndi Ives, Greg Gordon, John & Grace Darling, Diane Benson, Sharon Thorwald, Nancy Hagwood, Larry Norris, Thomas Templeton, Carrie McLaughlin, Pete and Wanda Martin and Bill Limer.



*Don Graves chats with a volunteer from the Denton Organic Garden Club.*



*Greg Gordon holds "Nitrogen" the bunny.*

## Welcome New Master Composters

The annual Master Composter workshop took place February 25 and 26<sup>th</sup>. Once again, the interest level was high and registration up. We welcome our new Master Composter interns: **Kregg Bodily, Sharon Clarke, Jacob Cline, Paula Cline, Don Coldiron, Florence Darraugh, Sylvia Davies, William Davies, Gala Dubois, Jeanette Hackler, Marianne Higgins, Robert Higgins, Robert Igel, Mary McCoy, Oludayo Orekoya, Steve Pape,**

**Mitchell Pettitt, Nancy Pettitt, Laverne Pingel, Wendy Saigal, Penny Sambell, Kay Sekio, Sandra Sorio, Mark Stanley, Inez Stephens, Barbara Tucker, Gerald Tucker, Brandon Utterback, Sarahlyn Watt, William Zimmerman.**

Thank you to everyone who came to the class and a **BIG special thanks to our instructor, Jane Borland** and to Diane Benson and Sharon Thorwald who also helped out with the class.

### Johnny's Black Gold



Pictured above, Johnny Presson shows off over 6 cubic yards of screened compost. He spent 15 hours screening at Tierra Verde.

# The Crotchety Composter by John Darling

I've been struggling to compose a few compost signs for the demonstration sites, and that's made me realize how long it's been since I made normal compost. Here's how they come out if I tell the truth:

## Why make compost?

*Because being part of the world's most wasteful culture is disgusting.* That probably won't work; maybe something more positive: *Because it's just plain cool to have the smallest trash bag on the block.* There must be other reasons but I'm stumped. On a practical level, my usual reasons involve squirrels, opossums, raccoons, and cats that failed to grasp the physics of automobiles in motion. Or saying okay to somebody who bought (theoretically) compostable plates, cups, and utensils for some tree-hugger potluck dinner.

## How do we make compost?

First, forget everything in the books. Second, fiddle around with some stuff, wait a while, and call it done. Need a compost instructor? I'm ready. Here's proof: A while

ago I stuffed about 80 leaf bags into a big wire cylinder, watering as I filled to pack it down. A week later it hit 130 degrees even though the mess was too wide, too tall, and had no nitrogen to speak of. So there.



## How to Make Compost

1. Start with carbon: leaves, cups and forks.
2. Add asparagus and bananas, and a rat if you have one.
3. Layer in more carbon.
4. Follow with lettuce and celery.
5. Larger pieces should be chopped, especially if they're hard to lift.
6. Don't leave produce in the bag too long during warm weather.

## Meanwhile...

... over at UTA the groundskeepers started bringing tons of leaves to their site just as I got really good at forgetting to work there. They buried the old windrow under new leaves, so I excavated down to the good stuff and started a new windrow. As I began to feel virtuous, a groundskeeper stopped by and announced that I was only receiving the tip of the iceberg; they were sparing my delicate sensibilities by throwing away leaves with trash mixed in. It's pretty clear that they haven't seen what comes out of our stolen leaf bags.

Latest great UTA development: The staff people who want to encourage campus composting just

started sending a worker around to their various coffee outlets to pick up grounds twice a week. And another good thing: Today I got a



*The UTA site rule is simple: Don't cover up the sign.*

call from the second environmental engineering graduate student who needs compost for her thesis project. The first one graduated before I got him to tell me in small words what he did with it, but this one, Divya Garrepalli, was much more forthcoming. Turns out both students study biofiltration, using compost microorganisms to break down nasty gases. The previous project was aimed at some of the gases released from sewage treatment plants, and Divya is investigating compost filtration for gases produced at paper mills. It's no wonder I have trouble making a nice, normal compost sign—I never seem to talk to the right people.

## Follow-up:

A while ago we went to Utah to be grandparents and I was struck by the miserable condition of my daughter's compost bin. So I generally got out of everybody's way and

lashed together a 3-bin set with an old chicken coop on one end and straw bales on the other. We departed with me basking in the glow of a job well done (or at least done). Now I hear that the piles are being vandalized by mobs of skunks. They're on their own; a Master Composter can only do so much.



*If you build it, they will come.*

## Big Follow-up:

Sometime in 2003 I sliced up an old cotton shirt on top of a deceased opossum and accidentally ignored the pile until a month ago.

Actually, I forgot which pile had the interesting ingredients, so I got a surprise when I scrapped off several inches and discovered bones and a shirt label. Not a trace of pink shirt anywhere.

And you thought I was just being eccentric!



*The big shirt composting experiment: Before.*



*After*

## Compost Chat and Chew

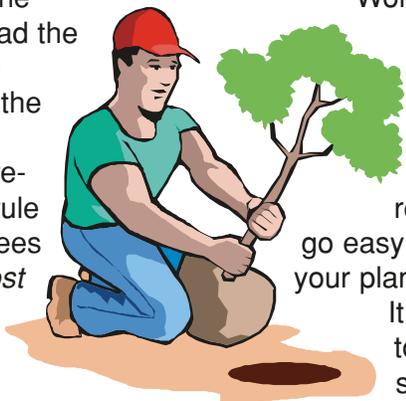
by Jane Borland

Spring is on the way, so I thought we might just review a few tips with regard to compost and gardening.

If you are going to plant a new tree, remember, you do NOT want to put compost in the hole. Doing so makes the roots want to stay in the hole rather than spreading out. You are, in reality, making the tree become root-bound in the hole. It is better to spread the compost on the surface around the tree and let the nutrients seep down.

It's time to plant bare-root roses. The same rule applies to them as to trees — *don't put the compost in the hole!*

Use pine needles for mulching around your roses instead of trying to compost them.



If you are preparing your flower beds, till in 1/2 to 1 inch of compost in fairly good soils and up to 2 inches in thick, clay or sandy soils.

As soon as you begin to see your grass turning green, you may want to apply 1/2 inch of compost over the entire lawn for your spring "fertilizer" application.

Since we are doing the Worm Workshop, I just want to

remind you that worm castings and the liquid in the drain bucket are much richer than regular compost, so go easy when applying to your plants.

It looks like it is going to be another wet spring which causes lots of fungus problems on roses and crepe myrtles. A

strong dose of home-made foliar compost tea may be the cure. Here's the recipe.

Make a compost tea bag out of panty hose and compost.

- If possible, use filtered water because chlorine in tap water will kill the helpful bacteria at first, though not long term.
- Use a transparent bottle and set out in the sun.
- Add 1/2 cup molasses per gallon of water to increase the bacterial content and help raise the energy level of the tea.
- Let it steep for 1 week. It will have a strong smell, but that's O.K.
- Add 5 tablespoons of soap per gallon of water as a wetting agent.

I know this is old hat to some of you, but for some of us, it's nice to be reminded of all of the things we seem to forget. I hope everyone has a wonderful spring.

# A Message from the Backyard Compost Coordinator

I'd like to say welcome to all the new Master Composter interns. I look forward to getting to know you better and hope you will contact me any time you need.

I am sure most of you have heard by now that the Arlington City Council approved the privatization of the Arlington Sanitary Landfill. City staff is currently working with Republic Waste on the transition which will officially take place on May 1<sup>st</sup>. I am pleased that all recycling

programs at the landfill will continue and that the City has also committed to continue other waste reduction programs such as curbside recycling, household hazardous waste disposal and THE MASTER COMPOSTER PROGRAM, of course. Please feel free to contact me regarding any questions you may have regarding the landfill so I can put you in contact with the appropriate staff member. Thanks.

— Lorrie



## Wormshop

Just a reminder to composters old and new that our annual Wormshop is March 10th. We will meet at 7:00 on Thursday, March 10th at the Municipal Office Tower located at 201 E. Abram Street. Please go to the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor where we'll join Mr. Hugh Ross for an enlightening vermicomposting presentation.

For those interested in starting a worm compost bin, we'll provide free worms but please bring your own container (a bucket or Rubbermaid tub). We'll also provide the necessary bedding materials and a drill to make air holes so your worms can breathe.

This is the perfect opportunity for us the get acquainted as we welcome our new master composter interns so I hope you'll join us.



## Leaf Recycling Update

In its third year, Arlington's leaf recycling program continues to be successful. Over 528 tons of leaves were collected for recycling through our drop off sites. This voluntary program continues to be overwhelmingly popular as more and more Arlington residents are demonstrating their environmental awareness by participating in the City's solid waste reduction programs such as leaf recycling, curbside recycling and the computer roundup.



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