ORGANIC MATTER

Your yard can provide you with a treasure of organic matter for your gardens. Some may need to be composted to be useful, others not.

Organic matter - any material that was at one time living and is now at a stage of decomposition. Humus is the stable form of organic matter. For the soil it:

1. Adds nutrients. The majority of the nutrients a plant needs come from organic matter, not from the minerals in the soil.
2. Adds water absorbing ability
3. Breaks up clay soils
4. Holds together sandy soils
5. Creates good friable tillable soil
6. Provides food and a good growing environment for soil microorganisms
7. Adds cation reaction

Composting

Passive compost pile - this is nothing more than just stacking up the yard waste material and letting it rot, very little work involved. This pile is usually cool and will take over a year to decompose enough to use in the garden. The coarser the material the longer the process will take.

Active compost pile - a pile that has been layered or mixed with an activator and the material could be shredded. This pile will reach center temperatures of 130-140 degrees. Can be done in two to three months. This pile requires some work. It needs to be mixed. Chopped or shredded material decomposes at a much faster rate. Using a shredder or chopping with a lawn mower can accomplish this.

Activator - an activator is soil, manure, compost, etc. that is mixed into the pile to inoculate it with the decomposers, which are bacteria and fungus. Many forms of raw organic matter have a high carbon to nitrogen ratio and won't readily rot unless an activator is used.

Organic Matter from Your Yard

Leaves - there is no need to compost leaves. They can be mixed directly into your garden areas in the fall or very early spring. By next spring, planting time, they will be decomposed enough so that they will add valuable organic matter to the soil. Burning leaves is a mortal sin. If you do compost leaves it is best to mix them with other material. Leaves tend to lay flat and mush together. This slows down the decay process because of the lack of water and air.

Grass clippings - the main problem with this material is that it gets moldy. This is because of the high moisture content and the grass packs together, creating a situation for poor air circulation. If this is mixed with some coarse material it will rot quicker and

mold less. Like leaves it can be mixed directly into the garden in the fall or very early spring.

Coarse green material - this is material such as weeds, pulled plants, and straw, etc. This material should be allowed to rot in a pile before use. It is hard to handle in the garden in its whole form.

Coarse woody material - if buried in the pile small twigs will rot. The larger the size, the more difficult or close too impossible to rot.

Sawdust - sawdust will rot and create good compost if mixed with other material. Sawdust by itself is a very slow to decompose. It can be mixed directly into the soil in small amounts. Probably 1-2" into 4-6" of soil.

Kitchen wastes - this can be a source of some organic matter. Avoid meat, fat and other animal products. Vegetable material like fruit, lettuce, coffee grounds, misc. all can be used.

Purchased organic matter

There are many sources of organic matter available to you. Some can be bought in small amounts and many can be trucked in bulk.

Peat moss

- sold in compressed bales or loose filled bags
- easy to use
- cost effect for small projects
- little to no nutrients
- can create an acid soil pH if use in larger amounts
- can be hard to initially wet

Bagged Manure's

- sold in small loose filled bags
- easy to use
- cost effective for small jobs
- a lot of the good structure of the material is lost through the processing
- nutrients vary with the animal

Rice Hulls

- sold in highly compressed bags, if the bags get wet they will rupture
- cost effective
- easy to use except for the fact they are light and blow all over
- slow to rot because of high carbon to nitrogen ratio
- great for keeping the soil loose
- little if any nutrients

- maybe hard to find

Cocoa Bean Pods
- sold in loose filled bags
- easy to use but will get moldy if piled to thick
- slow to rot
- great for keeping the soil loose
- maybe hard to finds

Bulk Manure
- sold be the cubic yard
- coarse unprocessed
- bulky and is harder to use
- cost effect for larger projects
- needs to be turned into the soil
- purchase only aged manure

Bulk Compost - Yard Waste Compost
- sold by the cubic yard
- many communities offer this material to their residents free of charge
- great source of organic material
- cost effect for small and large jobs
- material is not processed so it needs to be turned into the soil