

What are we all going to do with all the clean up debris from our gardens? The answer is compost it! Read on for a few tips.

Dave Peters from Kitsap County Public Works is the King of Compost in Kitsap County. Dave and his team of experts have trained teams of Master Composters to conduct classes and answer questions at the Master Gardener Demonstration Sites. They'll come to your group to talk too. And its free.

Two classes you can attend this month are: Saturday October 13 from 1:00 to 2:30 p.m. at the Northwest College of Arts Garden in Poulsbo (entrance is across from the George Fireworks Stand by Milepost 9) and Wednesday October 24 at the Bainbridge Island Library from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. Classes are also offered on a regular basis at the Givens Community Center, Anna Smith Children's Garden and Raab Park Youth/Community Garden.

You can call 360-337-5777 or 800-825-4940 from 8:00 to 4:00 Monday through Friday all year long except holidays. This website www.mastercomposters.com is like having your own personal Master Composter available 24 hours a day. You'll find plans for several kinds of worm bins and instructions on a variety of compost systems. You'll learn the recipe for making compost and find current research available. Remember our local libraries have free computers available to use.

To make compost all you need are: carbon, nitrogen, water and oxygen. The best part is all these ingredients are totally free. Except of course the water maybe, but if you have a rainbarrel to catch rain, even the water is free.

Dave Peters or the Master Composters can and will give you a free Compost Wheel. It's a snazzy two-sided tool to answer nearly any question imaginable. One side lists ingredients to use in composting and the other side lists all the problems you might encounter and what to do.

Carbon is often called brown material. It includes dead leaves (chopped up), woody materials and dried, brown grass or straw. (Straw doesn't have seeds, hay does, so use straw not hay). Nitrogen comes from green material such as fresh grass, fruit and vegetable remains and livestock manure. (I once thought manure was a brown material, but remember that livestock eat plant matter and plants are green.). The water comes from a garden faucet or from the sky and the oxygen is all around us. Composters incorporate oxygen by turning the piles of compost. The compost process works quicker with oxygen but piles that aren't turned will eventually become rich composted matter too. It just takes longer.

Here's what the Compost Wheel says about water. The organisms that make compost need a warm, moist environment. Materials such as food remains and fresh grass clippings have a high water content and add moisture to the pile. If your pile is too dry add water. Too much water or wet material cools the pile and the organisms that make compost become inactive or dormant.

At this point in my column some of you are probably saying, "Sounds like work to me." But there are all kinds of compost methods to employ. Some piles of compost are extremely passive. We have a pile of brush and branches in our garden that is decomposing naturally because we've never gotten around to chipping and shredding it up. You can rent a chipper if you don't have your own. Our neighbors often chip in and rent one for everyone to use on a weekend.

Weeds can even be used in composting. They're a green, nitrogen rich material. Pull, snip, and chop those little pesky plants before they set any seed. You don't want to compost bindweed though. Every time you turn your

compost pile you'll expose any weed seeds you missed to the sun and to further decomposition. Some people have a bin just for weeds.

We'll talk more about composting next week. In the meantime visit the compost website, try to attend a class from the Master Composters at the NW College of Arts Garden or Bainbridge Library, or go visit one of the Master Gardener demonstration gardens to see their compost systems.

Send comments or questions to Peg at gardenmentor@yahoo.com or in care of this newspaper.