

Composting stations can be attractive, convenient

By Melinda Myers

Make recycling green debris into compost convenient and attractive. Create a space you and your neighbors will appreciate. And locate composting in a convenient area that is easy to access and manage so you are more likely to do it.

You'll quickly recoup your initial investment of time and money by spending less time hauling the materials to the recycling center and on soil amendments.

Most important, you'll boost the health and beauty of your landscape while helping the environment.

Start by looking for spaces in the landscape or garden where compostable materials can easily be moved into the bin, pile turned, and the finished compost harvested and transported into the garden where it is needed. You found a place to stow the trash cans without ruining the beauty of your landscape or offending your neighbors, so do the same with your compost area.



Decorative fences are an effective way to hide composting stations conveniently tucked behind

gardens in the landscape.

Photo/Melinda Myers LLC

Purchase or build a compost bin that matches your landscape style. Some bins are built to be an attractive addition to the landscape while others are designed to fade into the garden and go unnoticed. Try using materials similar to your fence, shed or other structures. Situate the bin so it appears to be an extension of these or an additional garden feature.

Speed up the composting process by creating a pile at least three feet tall and wide. Use only insect- and disease-free materials. Do not include meat, fat, bones, or dairy products that can attract rodents or weeds and invasive plants that can survive most composting and end up back in your garden.

Mix nitrogen rich green materials such as vegetable scraps, and herbicide-free grass clippings and carbon rich browns such as cornstalks, evergreen needles and tree leaves. Top this 8- to 10-inch layer with compost and sprinkle three cups of a low nitrogen slow release fertilizer over this layer. The organic nitrogen helps feed the microorganisms that break down the raw materials into compost. Continue layering with plant debris, compost and fertilizer until the pile is at least 3-feet high.

Use plants to screen the compost process. Place a simple wire bin in the middle of the garden. It's convenient; since this is the place you generate garden debris and use much of the finished product. The surrounding plantings will hide the bin.

Or place your bin behind a garden border of tall grasses, shrubs or other permanent plantings. Make sure your neighbors' view is equally as nice. Leave sufficient room for adding materials to compost, turning the pile if needed and harvesting the compost.

Team up with your neighbors to create more gardening and composting space. Design a shared garden and compost area

across the lot line. Use steppers for easy access and beautify both yards with attractive plantings. You'll each enjoy the extra garden space and valuable compost you create.

Up the ornamental appeal a bit more by installing a decorative fence as a backdrop for one of your garden beds. Design the screen to run parallel to a fence or hedge along the lot line. Leave enough space between the two structures for composting, storing mulch, shredded leaves, garden stakes and more. Include a gate or entryway along the side for easy access.

Once you start exploring options, your creativity will help you build a composting space suited to your needs. Then get ready to enjoy the increased beauty and productivity that the compost will provide in your gardens and containers.

Gardening expert Melinda Myers has more than 30 years of horticulture experience and has written more than 20 gardening books, including "Small Space Gardening" and the "Midwest Gardener's Handbook." She hosts The Great Courses "How to Grow Anything: Food Gardening For Everyone" DVD set and the nationally syndicated "Melinda's Garden Moment" TV and radio segments.