

Make more use of composting

As I look across the county, I can see quite a few vegetable gardens that have been planted and doing very well. Tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers, squash, cantaloupes and watermelons will soon be harvested from local gardens across the county. Everybody wants quality fruits and vegetables they will be proud of. However, that's not the case every time. Some garden spots fail to have the production yield because of several negating factors like insects, diseases and water. One in particular is good soil. Being a good gardener means being a good steward of the land. You have to put back what you have taken out of the soil. There is a great way to put back what has been taken out, and that is to use composted materials. Sure, you can use inorganic fertilizers to increase soil fertility; however, there are so many organic items around your house that can make your garden soil terrific.

Composting has been around for very long time. It gives you the opportunity to handle your yard refuses. Remember, everybody has waste from the home that needs to be addressed. It can be bagged and taken to the landfill or utilized as compost. If you are serious about our environment, you understand that we play an important role in recycling and reusing material. Composted material is a very inexpensive way to help improve our environment and your garden. Getting started is very easy, and all it takes is selecting a good site, preparing a small structure, collecting organic materials, and letting Mother Nature do her work.

When composting, select a site that is away from your house and the neighbors. This ensures that potential organic items that have a little odor will not be a problem because as you turn your compost pile, the odor will disappear. In addition, you can place the pile in close proximity to your garage or other areas where you frequent so that you are able check for decomposition. Selecting a composting structure is very important in providing good decomposition. There are several structures that work very well for composting. They are: 55-gallon drum with top, circular bin, and three-chambered compartment. If you just want to experiment, then going with the 55-gallon drum with ventilation holes is a very inexpensive compost structure that will fit your needs. For the serious gardener who wants to put a lot of items in a compost pile, the three-chambered compartment

will provide the necessary space for different levels of composted material. This structure requires a little bit more attention and cost; however, it is very practical and useful in accomplishing the decomposition process.

Collecting useful organic material is the basis of your compost pile. You need items that are going to breakdown quickly and give the desired results. Certain materials are better than others. Take for instance food waste, leaves, grass clippings, straw, rotted manure, and fruit waste. These are the best organic materials to be used in a compost pile because they have a very good carbon-to-nitrogen ratio. Items that don't fit into composting would be dairy products, whole eggs, pet feces, and weedy plants. These items pose a health threat or create a nuisance because they just don't work very well.

As the organic material collected goes in your compost pile, remember that efficient decomposition must take place. Good oxygen levels, adequate moisture, small particle size and high temperature get the job for composting organic material. Composting involves regularly checking and turning the pile, and making sure its temperatures are high enough to accomplish decomposition. Over the next couple of months, the decomposition process should be complete. The final product should be a rich humus product with an earthy smell. The compost pile doesn't take a lot work, but adding the right ingredients and letting Mother Nature take her course. You should be able use your new soil amendment and incorporate it into your soil to create better holding qualities and soil fertility. If you want to make a dramatic change to your garden, I suggest incorporating composted material to your soil. It is a known fact that better soils create better plants for you and I to harvest. You can be the envy of your neighbors with a little help of your own composter. If you would like more information on how to start composting, please call the Oconee co. Cooperative Extension office at (706) 769 -3946 or stop by the office at 23 Water Street Watkinsville, Ga. 30677.