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Compost

It may have a dirty reputation, but it will do wonders for your garden

by Joan Boram
special writer

You've probably noticed that the word "earth" is very popular today. T-shirts, bumper stickers, coffee mugs, even rock groups, urge us to treat the earth with respect.

A good part of the earth, especially the parts we stand on, is soil. And soil, unfortunately, has a bad reputation. This is in part due to detergent commercial: "Soiled? Ugh! Out, out, begone!"

Logic tells us that we can't extend homage to the earth without some deference to soil. Fortunately, there's a way of combining our good will towards both earth and soil. It's called composting.

"Composting is the victim of several popular misconceptions," says Bob Bricault, consumer horticultural agent for the Michigan State University's Wayne County Extension Service. "A lot of people think that compost pile will attract vermin, but that isn't true if composting is done correctly."

A compost pile, Bricault says, should consist of 2 parts brown matter, such as dried leaves, shredded branches, and 2 parts green organic matter, such as

uncooked kitchen waste and grass clippings. Mix well with air and water, and some soil, or even finished compost to get the bacterial action going. It's the bacteria that transforms this mixture into compost.

"Never, never put in meat scraps, fats, dairy products, oils or bones," he cautions. "And never, ever put in pet droppings, unless your pet happens to be a cow or a chicken."

Bricault, who lovingly tends a compost pile at his Livonia home, says many people are hesitant about grass clippings because they can emit an odor. But if they're mixed with a brown matter, such as dried leaves, an odor is the last thing you'll have to worry about, he says.

"Last summer, a neighbor thought he was doing me a favor and dumped four bags of grass clippings in my yard. I could smell them as soon as I pulled into the driveway," Bricault recalls. "Luckily, the wind was blowing away from the neighbors behind me, who were out in their pool. I quickly mixed the clippings with some dried leaves and the smell disappeared."

The best place for grass clippings is on the ground, he says. They have very

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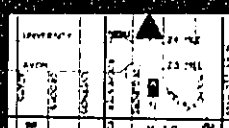
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