**COMPOSTING FOR THE HOME GARDENER**

**The Trouble with Composting**

There are so many ways to build a useful batch of compost that it is easy to be confused as how to start. It is also difficult to get it wrong. Google “composting” and sample some of the information on the web and you will see what I mean. The two sites listed below I have found to be very useful, one is on general composting and the other on vermicomposting.

**Web Sites:**

Uncle Jim’s Worm Farm

A Good you tube video on a simple worm bin.

Composting for the Homeowner- University of Illinois

Web.extension.Illinois.edu/home compost/intro.cfm

**Books**:

The Complete Compost Gardening Guide

Barbara Pleasant & Deborah L. Martin

The Rodale Book of composting

Mike McGrath’s Book of Composting

**How to Compost:**

Choose a container that’s made of wood (or some other sturdy material) and no smaller than three by three feet. Place it in your yard in a shady spot with good drainage. Start adding waste in a ratio of three “browns” to one “green.” Browns are carbon-rich materials and include wood chips, straw, branches, and leaves. Greens provide nitrogen and include grass clippings and kitchen scraps, like eggshells and carrot tops. When you’re adding new material, dig a hole in the pile and stir the new stuff in so it gets coated with the old mixture.  
  
 If you notice a stench, make sure you have enough browns in the pile. (Collect your neighbors’ bags of dry leaves and add them to your own.) Also check the moisture level by grabbing a handful of the heap. It should be at about 50 to 60 percent, meaning the compost feels like a wrung-out sponge. If it’s too dry, let rain even out the moisture. If it’s too wet, add a few more browns.  
  
 When it’s ready for use, which could take anywhere from a few months to a year, compost looks and smells like very dark soil. If you’re unsure, put it to the Baggie test: Place a small amount in a plastic bag and take a whiff before sealing. Then place the bag in a drawer for a few days. When you open the bag, the sample should smell the same as it did before. If it smells worse, your compost needs more time in the pile.