



Solana Center for Environmental Innovation

25 Years of Positive Change...



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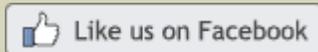
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Thank you to all our
Volunteers! We would like
to
specifically acknowledge the

The Composter Newsletter

Solana Center for Environmental Innovation

Quarterly Newsletter

Spring 2012

Toast to Compost 2012

**following volunteers for
their support:**

Andi MacLeod
Asha Kreiling
Bradley Nussbaum
Bryn Faris
Byron Spratt
Carol Morse
Carol Graham
Carol Prior
Charles Anacker
Chris Raub
David Emmerson
Deryl Adderson
Diane Hazard
Dodi Hemingway
Donna Uyeno
Elizabeth Mendelson
Emily Raub
Eric Romer
Erin Ferguson
Erin McConkey
Georgia Nally
Greg Paris
Jackie Tam
Jason Rein
Jean Scherschell
Jennifer Nelson
Jim Beyster
Jim Renn
Joseph Jeide
Karen Rich
Kurt Wong
Laura Jeremiah
Lisa Roop
Lori Paris
Marianne West
Marysa Andriola
Michelle Young
Mim Michelove
Mo Rafael
Nathan Hughes
Nathan Smedley
Nick Ainslie
Nora Adderson
Paula Hildrebrant
Phyllis Marrow
Rebecca Woolley
Robert Hughes
Shawn Katebian
Shel Barkan



On Saturday, March 3rd the Solana Center, in collaboration with the San Diego Zoo and the City of San Diego, hosted the annual "Toast to Compost" event. This year's "Toast to Compost" was arguably one of our most enjoyable and successful Master Composter appreciation events. Fifty guests enjoyed breakfast with fellow Master Composters and had the opportunity to swap stories, tips, updates, and even recruit additional help for their own composting projects.

Our very own Managing Director, Bill Dean, was the guest speaker, and he used the opportunity to praise the Master Composter volunteers for their dedication to composting at home and in the community. One volunteer that was recognized for her unquestionable commitment was Whitney Dueñez who received the first annual "Golden Pitchfork" award for completing over 2,000 volunteer hours with the Solana Center. The San Diego Zoo then delivered a fascinating and adorable presentation on meerkats with a live meerkat present. Guests witnessed eating habits of the meerkat when it was fed live worms (NOT red wigglers, we promise!). As a token of our appreciation, Master Composters in attendance were randomly selected in a raffle for gifts generously donated by our event sponsors.

Overall it was a beautiful morning spent with a very talented and passionate group of composters. We are grateful for all of our volunteers, particularly our Master Composters, who make our work in spreading compost information and enthusiasm possible. A special thanks to the following sponsors for their support. For more information on any of these local sponsors, please click on the company's name:

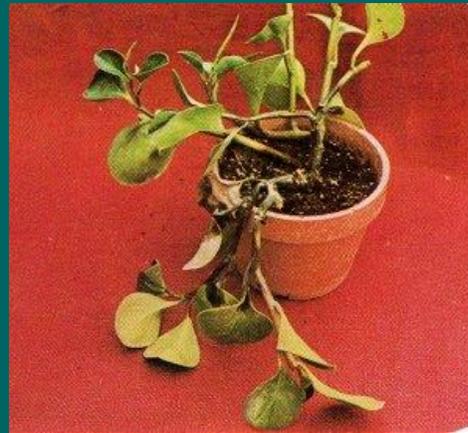
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Sura Katz
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How Does Uncured Compost Harm Plants?

by Asha Kreiling



Curing compost is the process when heat in the compost pile dissipates and the ecology of the microbe population changes. Certain kinds of soil bacteria, such as azobacteria, take over and produce high amounts of nitrates (which plants need to grow) and balance the carbon-nitrogen ratio of the compost pile, which is important in making nutrients available to plants. Decomposition of the compost material slows down, but continues to occur while the diversity of microorganisms increases.

Using uncured compost can potentially harm plants due to its unstable nature. Uncured compost may contain high levels of compounds like ammonia which can weaken or kill plants, by making soil too acidic. Adding uncured compost to soil can also reduce the amount of nitrogen available to plants, because as microorganisms continue to break down material that has not fully decomposed, they take up nitrogen in the soil for their own growth.

In contrast, cured compost contains more nitrate and less ammonia due to longer maturation and mineralization. Cured compost is also more stable, meaning it will not become hot or increase in respiration when watered or turned as unfinished compost does. Phytotoxicity, a toxic effect on plant growth, can be caused by compost that is not stable or fully matured. Phytotoxins can cause decreased oxygen and nitrogen levels in the soil, making it harder for plants to grow.

Read back on our past blog post on how to cure compost:
<http://solanacompost.wordpress.com/2009/02/25/rotline-question-of-the-week-what-does-curing-compost-mean/>

Sources:

<http://www.woodsend.org/pdf-files/rootcomp.pdf>

http://www.acresusa.com/toolbox/reprints/Nov2010_ShafferCompost.pdf

<http://urbancomposting.tripod.com/Urbancomposting%20Webs/Use%20guide.htm>

Meet Solana Center's Newest Team-Member, Jennifer Sipe



Jennifer is originally from central Ohio, an expansive, rural farming community. Her family practiced sustainable crop and livestock farming for many years. She attended Ohio State University, where she studied Industrial/Organizational Psychology. After graduation, she traveled to the west coast, and gradually integrated into the urban agriculture community in San Diego. She is passionate about the availability of locally grown food! She enjoys the opportunity to learn about gardening and composting through volunteering at community gardens and educational farms. She also has a garden at home and is interested in keeping goats and chickens. She enjoys the outdoors-exploring new areas to camp, hike, and bike with friends and family. Jennifer has been providing high-level administrative support for over 8 years and is excited to be an integral part in the facilitation of environmental

awareness programs offered through the Solana Center.

Reaching out to City Heights with Compost

by Asha Kreiling



For the length of my internship with the Solana Center, I have witnessed great enthusiasm for composting from Solana Center staff and visitors. Compost aficionados always seem to be showing up to buy compost and worm bins, or are calling with Rotline questions. However, for residents of urban, low-income multi-family apartment complexes, such as those in City Heights, composting tends to be more of a challenge. Factors such as living in small spaces, tight finances, or less access to information and resources make composting more difficult.

I decided I wanted to reach out to apartment complexes in City Heights to teach residents about the importance of composting and to get them involved in diverting their food waste. Without funding or clear expectations for my internship project, I attempted to establish compost programs at two low-income apartment complexes by using flyers, door-to-door outreach, and educational presentations. In the beginning, I was met with difficulties and disappointment from a lack of participation and interest.

In the past month, however, I have begun to see some exciting progress. I started working with a large complex called Hollywood Palms in City Heights where they already have a small community garden and staff members interested in my project. With the help of the young kids at the complex, we have built and painted colorful compost bins. We are distributing plastic buckets for food scraps to residents, which will be collected and emptied weekly by myself and volunteers. Studies estimate the average American throws out about 1.3 lbs of food waste per day, amounting to 474.5 pounds per year per person. That means if I get half of the 90-some residents at Hollywood Palms to separate their food waste, we could divert approximately 10 tons of food waste from the landfill in one year!

I'm excited about resident and youth participation in this community compost project, and I curiously await the long-term results of waste diversion. On March 17th, Bill Dean and I will conduct a compost workshop for the residents to teach them the steps of composting as well as its importance and how they can get involved. From then we will watch this City Heights apartment complex develop its composting system, and if successful, it will become a model example for other San Diego communities.

Compost in Container Gardens



As important as compost is to our traditional gardens, it can be just as useful for our container gardens that also risk losing vital nutrients over time. By adding compost, you are ensuring that your potted plants have a great source of nutrients and effective drainage. Both compost and worm castings can be used successfully in container gardens as a soil amendment with slight differences in the use of each. Creating your own container gardening mix with compost is a great alternative to purchasing pre-packaged garden soil. Although recipes differ, most encourage using 1/4 -1/3 parts compost. To make a great container gardening medium that offers ideal soil structure and nutrient levels we suggest the following for each pot of mixture:

2 parts compost (either traditional compost and/or vermicompost)
1 part coconut coir
1 part garden loam
*1 part sterilized sand
(*optional)

Vermicompost is also used to make up about 1/4 of total soil volume in container plants when mixed with potting soil. It can also be used as top-dressing for container plants by spreading 1 to 2 inches around the base of flowers and vegetables, avoiding direct contact with stems or trunks.

Through the incorporation of compost in our pots, we can help ensure a beautiful and bountiful container garden for the coming spring and summer!

Sources:

Dabbs, Amy. "Worm Composting". Clemson University Cooperative Extension, Home & Garden Information Center. July 2009.

<http://www.clemson.edu/extension/hgic/plants/other/compost_mulch/hgic1607.html>

Relf, Diane. "Using Compost in Your Landscape". Virginia Tech & Virginia State Cooperative Extension. May 2009. <<http://pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-704/426-704.html>>.

Have we wormed our way into your heart?



Become a Solana Center Volunteer!

If you are interested in becoming a Solana Center volunteer, please register by [clicking here](#).

Opportunities include composting, gardening, community education, and much more! Please contact Dominique Navarro with any questions: dominique@solanacenter.org

E-Waste Events in Spring!

The Solana Center hosts free monthly electronic waste (e-waste) collection events for all County of San Diego residents. These drop-off events are held every fourth Saturday of each month from 9am to noon. The next E-Waste Events are scheduled for:

- April 28th
- May 26th
- June 23rd

Recycle San Diego collects the electronic waste and properly disposes of it. All events will be held at the Solana Center ([click here](#) for directions) and are sponsored by the City of Encinitas.

For more information contact Sandy at (760) 436-7986 ext. 213.

Please do not bring lights bulbs or batteries to these events. To find out where to recycle these items please visit our website by [clicking here](#).



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