

## Ripple Effect #84

### **Composting: As Basic as C, B, A**

The topic of composting is discussed a lot these days. But most of us put off taking up the practice. We need reminding – and perhaps the encouragement that composting can be as basic a practice as “C, B and A.”

*What is Composting?* It is the natural breakdown of organic material, anything from vegetable scraps to leaves, into a dark substance that looks like soil and is called humus.

This decomposition is accomplished by soil microorganisms, such as bacteria and fungi. These microorganisms produce enzymes that digest organic materials. So if you just mix the organic material with a little soil, the process can begin.

Why should I do it? *Because of the multiple positive effects you can achieve.* When we compost our kitchen scraps or those leaves on our lawn, we are keeping excess nitrogen out of our waters and water systems AND we are producing a product, the resulting humus, which we can use to lighten our heavy, clay soils and reduce the need for synthetic fertilizers.

Synthetic fertilizers are notorious for ending up washed into storm sewers, streams or lakes, causing excess nutrient loads. Trying to reduce these excess nutrient loads once they have occurred can take decades, even years, and sometimes complete restoration is not possible. Also, the solutions are costly.

In addition, composting can lower the costs of waste. Estimates suggest that from 30% to 50% of the waste produced by each household can be composted. This can extend the lives of landfill sites by years, and everyone saves in the bargain.

*So how do I get At it?* Although composting can be done in the open with the help of an easy-to-construct container of chicken wire and two-by-fours, people often choose to purchase an enclosed container system. Many towns have the latter for sale at reasonable, often reduced, prices, complete with instructions. Some stores also sell compost systems, and, of course, the Internet offers a wide selection, together with helpful tips.

The biggest part of getting started is developing the habit. This may take the most effort of all, in both time and persistence. But there is little question of the worth of the results. Or the fact that the practice is as basic and fundamental to our lives as the beginning of the alphabet.

Until the next Ripple Effect,

The Red River Basin Commission (RRBC)

The RRBC is a grassroots organization that is a chartered not-for-profit corporation under the provisions of Manitoba, North Dakota, Minnesota, and South Dakota law. Our offices in Moorhead, MN and Winnipeg, MB can be reached at 218-291-0422 and 204-982-7254, or you can check out our website at [www.redriverbasincommission.org](http://www.redriverbasincommission.org).

