



HUMUS



How is humus formed naturally?

Humus results from the partial decomposition by the soil's micro-organisms of vegetable and animal waste. From this decomposition - essential for the natural food chain - and from humus's powers of absorption, is born a precious food reserve for the

plants and animals which live in that environment.

By forming compost in gardens, we act like nature and help keep our gardens healthy and productive.

Most (over 50%) of the solid waste we throw out every day can be made into humus that is useful for the garden. The volume of the waste is thus reduced, whilst the organic matter will be recycled and become easily assimilated by plants.

Compost is easy to make, cheap, and allows solid waste to be made into odourless humus, knitting light soils together and improving all kinds of soil.

What matter can be used to make humus?

Most vegetable- or animal-origin organic matter can be used, including:

1. garden waste: grass cuttings, leaves, flowers, clippings, dirt from cleaning out ponds, etc.;
2. kitchen waste: skins, vegetable leaves, fruit-stones and peelings,
3. left-overs from cooking: tea bags, egg-shells, heels of bread,
4. other waste: paper, cardboard boxes, sawdust, animal dirt, ash, algae.
5. but what must not be added to the compost heap are tree branches, pine-needles, seeds, garden waste that has been treated with pesticides, residue from septic tanks, droppings from diseased animals and all other matter that cannot be broken down such as metal, glass and plastic.

How does one make a compost heap?

There are many ways of going about it. The ideas we give below are given as a guide only. In fact, in the state of nature humus is formed without man's intervention.

A good size for a compost heap or ditch is 2 square metres. You need to:

1. mix the organic matter carefully, and make several layers of it,
2. start with a 200 mm. Layer to make a base for the compost heap,
3. speed up the decomposition process by adding some already prepared products,
4. add some earth, which contains live bacteria,
5. gradually lay down other layers, always making sure the top layer is well-packed, so that the organic nitrogen remains inside for nitrification, and so that bad smells do not escape and attract flies.

Stir up the compost heap a week later. Decomposition has already started to produce heat, which will be lost a few weeks later. This is why it is necessary to stir up the heap again, to speed up the ripening process.

Dampness in the compost heap

Keep the heap reasonably damp, because too much water will stop the decomposition process.

Fight insects and flies

If the compost heap has been well made, flies and other insects will not be attracted to the garden. As a further precaution, cover the heap with dry earth, sawdust or dried leaves.

Using humus in the garden

Humus is ready for use when it is friable and gives off a pleasant odour of damp compost. Spread it round the boles of trees and dig it into the ground by turning the soil over.

Thus we can at one and the same time get rid of our solid waste and produce humus, so useful in our gardens.

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