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Building Bins and Boxes for Compost

More and more gardeners are recycling household organic wastes by composting them. Many find that simply mounding compostable materials into a heap is unsatisfactory. Containers such as bins and boxes can protect the compost from wind, heavy rains and hot, baking sun. Many varieties of bins and boxes can make composting easier and improve its appearance and quality. The type of container you select depends upon your personal taste, the amount of labor you want to invest and the materials you have on hand.

Woven wire bin. One easy to make, economical container requires only a length of woven wire fencing held together by several small chain snaps.

Multiply the diameter you want for the compost heap by 3.1416. That's the length of wire you should buy. Once you've purchased the fencing and picked a location for the compost heap, bring both ends of the fencing together to form a circle.

The ends of the fencing are held together by three or four small chain snaps that are available at any hardware or discount store. Simply slip the snaps over any two wires to form the enclosure.

Start building the compost heap inside this wire enclosure. When it is half full, drive a wooden or steel stake through the center of the heap and into the soil beneath. Be sure that the stake is long enough so the top is as high as the final desired pile height. Fill to the top with compost material.

When you're ready to start a second heap, simply remove the snaps holding the ends of the fencing together. Pull the fence away from the completed heap, and erect it again at the new heap site. It takes less than a minute to remove these snaps and they can be used over and over again.

Even after the fencing is removed, the compost pile will keep a uniform shape. The stake through the center prevents it from caving in or falling apart.

If you're going to keep just one compost heap, remove the fencing when you get ready to turn the pile.

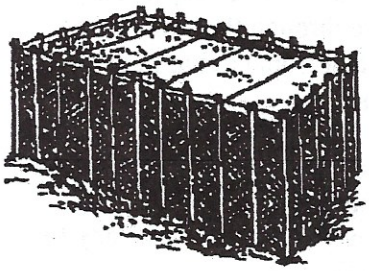
Set up the fencing within easy shoveling distance of the compost heap. Pull the stake out of the center. Now start turning the compost into the empty bin.

During dry weather spells, dig a depression in the top of each heap and water moderately. The stake will not interfere with the depression. In fact, the water will flow down the post into the center of the compost heap.

Chicken wire bin. A variation of the wire retainer described above can be made using chicken wire, wood stakes and soft iron baling wire. Thirty feet of ½"-woven chicken wire, 30 four-foot high stakes and about 60 feet of soft iron baling wire will make a container that will hold about 200 cubic feet of compost.

To construct this container, first mark off a rectangle about 10'x5'. Drive the stakes six inches deep along the edge of this rectangle, placing them about a foot apart. Loop the bin with a continuous strip of baling wire.

Chicken Wire Bin

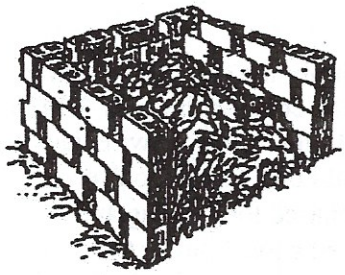


Place the chicken wire inside the stakes and fasten it by twisting small pieces of baling wire around the stakes.

Tie lengths of baling wire across the width of the container to keep the stakes from spreading when the bin is filled with compost. These cross braces looped over alternate pairs of stakes allow ample space for easy loading of your compost. As the compost presses outward against the chicken wire, the stakes will pull the soft baling wire bracings tightly around the container.

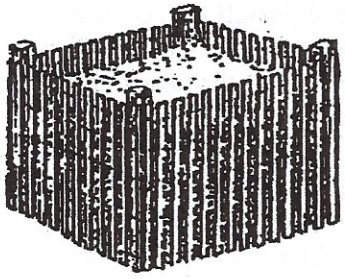
When it's time to turn the compost, remove the small ties holding the chicken wire to the wood stakes then remove the cross bracing wires. After pulling out the wooden stakes, carefully roll away the chicken wire and you'll find a nice solid pile of compost ready for turning. Use the same materials to rebuild your container within shoveling distance of the old heap.

Block or Brick Bins



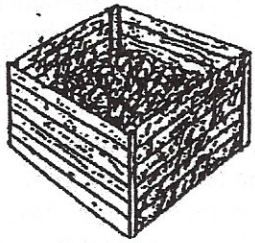
Compost bins can also be made of brick, or cement blocks, or rocks. Just lay the blocks without mortar. Leave spaces between each block to permit aeration. Pile them up to form three sides of a square container. This bin is sturdy, durable and easily accessible.

Snow Fence Bins



Some gardeners use prefabricated snow fencing for making compost bins. Snow fence bins are popular because they are simple to make and easy to move and store. To build this bin, buy the appropriate length of prefabricated fencing, and fasten two by fours (2 x 4s) to the bottom to form a square.

The New Zealand Box is another simple, efficient design developed by the Auckland Humic Club of New Zealand. There are many variations of this design. The simplest is a wooden structure 4 feet square by 4-5 feet high without top or bottom.



The wooden sides consist of 6-inch wide by ¾-inch thick boards. Allow ½-inch of air space between each board so that air may penetrate the heap from all sides. The box *is* movable.

A divider in front slides down between two posts so that when you want to empty the box, you can pull the dividers upward and take them out one by one. 2 x 4s provide the structural framework for this box.

The preferred method of filling the box is to mix organic materials thoroughly with soil, lime and manure. Make one air hole in the center of the box all the way down to the ground using a crowbar. If you turn the mixture twice, you don't need to put in an air hole after the second turn.

When the compost is ready to be turned, it has to be piled outside the box and then put back again