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## Composting Turns Garbage into Gold

*Nature takes decades or centuries to make humus in a field or forest setting. Humus is absolutely crucial for plant growth and nutrient cycling. In your back yard, you can make humus (finished compost) in two months!*

Compost is the ultimate in recycling.

You simply mix your leaves, grass clippings, weeds, and food waste with moisture, and stir occasionally. Then stand back! The Transformers go to work. The Transformers are microscopic organisms, and they wisely and magically process organic matter into nature's best fertilizer and soil conditioner: **compost**.

What happens when you forego the chemical fertilizers and spread mature compost instead? Your vegetables, flower and herb beds, berry bushes become robust and healthy. Your plants will give you more harvest. You'll remark at the absence of plant diseases, and notice less insect problems. You'll savor vegetables that are nutrient-dense and full-flavored. You'll spend much less time watering. You gain all this while saving on chemical fertilizers and completely avoiding toxic materials.

Why does compost give your plants all this vigor? It's because you are putting life into your soil. The life is the microorganisms in the compost, and these transformers know exactly how to change hard-to-digest soil minerals into forms that plants can use. Your compost is loaded with these micro-chemists, and they are ready and willing to unlock nutrients in your soil and turn them into meals for all your plant roots. When you add compost, you deploy an army (diverse members of a full soil food web), so you can stand back and let them cycle and deliver those minerals.

What else do you get? Your compost gives you a complete fertilizer and a soil make-over.

As a fertilizer, compost supplies nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium, and crucial trace minerals as well. Your chemical fertilizers do not provide those trace elements, leaving your soil depleted and hungry. Chemical

fertilizers are also highly soluble so they wash away early in the summer. Your compost is not particularly soluble, so it releases its nutrients gradually and steadily throughout the growing season.

As a soil conditioner, compost micro-workers are eager to improve your soil's aeration, texture, water-holding capacity and drainage. That's a lot of nurture packed into a batch of compost!

What happens when you add screened compost to your lawn? You eliminate turf diseases. Your grass builds deeper roots. Your grass begins to feel soft and springy. (Professional turf managers are applying compost to decrease sports injuries on ball fields.)

By the way, you'll water your lawn occasionally, while you watch your chemical neighbor irrigating constantly. So sit in the shade—even through the worst droughts—and enjoy the healthy green turf you've been wanting. Never worry about your toddler or the birds eating *Weed and Feed* granules again.

You can make or buy compost. Either way, applying compost is something you can do in your own back yard to practice recycling and ecological stewardship. Hurrah!

If you want to make your own, learn from a neighbor, book, class, or video. Get the Alaskan made video from Valley Community for Recycling Solutions at 745-5544. You'll get step-by-step instructions for only \$15.

If you want to buy mature, bagged compost, simply shop in a garden store. Then apply your compost lavishly! Use coarse compost for mulching shrubs and trees, and spread ½ " to 3" on your garden. Screen the compost or buy a finer-screened product for your lawn. Then water it well after applying.

Ahhh! Your plants will love you in healthy green ways!