



Dubois County Soil & Water Conservation District

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812-482-1171 x3 • www.duboisswcd.org

Summer 2011

The Conservation Conversation

Cover Crop Cost Share Applications Now Available

For the third year in a row, the Dubois County SWCD has received a grant for a cost-share program for cover crops. Applications will be taken to plant winter cover crops on Dubois County land until August 26th.

Once again the cover crop program will allow for the option of having the crops aurally applied by a small plane. The SWCD will bring in a plane to the Dubois County Airport in Huntingburg, where the plane will be filled with a special mix of cover crop seed. The mix selected this year includes crimson clover, daikon radish and winter oats.

Dubois County landowners will also be able to no-till drill this mix into their land if they choose not to aurally apply it. Landowners can also no-till wheat as a cover crop, but the cost share amount will be greatly reduced. A extra incentive will be paid to landowners who have never used cover crops on their land.

As part of the grant, the SWCD is also hosting a cover crop field day this fall. The SWCD will no-till a variety of plant species into a test plot which will be available for viewing at the field day.



Crimson clover sown as a cover crop. Among its many benefits, crimson clover can produce nitrogen at rates of 30-60 lbs per acre, storing valuable nutrients away for a future cash crop.

In order to qualify for the program, landowners must either aurally apply or broadcast the seed, or no-till into the land. Additionally, applicants must agree to no-till their spring cash crops into these same fields. Conventional tillage will not be allowed in this program.

For complete details on the program and to fill out your application, stop by the SWCD office. Call us at 812-482-1171 x3 for more information. Complete details of the program and the application are also on our website at www.duboisswcd.org.

Our website also has pictures of fully grown cover crops and descriptions of common cover crops and how they are useful for your land. If you have never used cover crops before, feel free to stop by the office to pick up a packet of information on cover crops and no-tilling practices and to ask any questions you may have.

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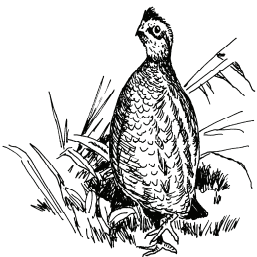
Build Your Own Nests for Wood Ducks and Mallards

Build it, and they will come. That's not true of nests you could build for many species of wildlife, but there are a few species that have proven they will take up temporary occupancy if you follow their rules of habitat. Those species include bluebirds, bats, wood ducks, mallards, kestrels, screech owls and Canada geese.

There are very specific rules to follow in both building and placing artificial nests, if you want to be successful over time in attracting specific birds. Our website has many great resources for you to use. Look under the backyard conservation section at the top of the website.

Ready to get started? Here are some thoughts from the USGS Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center to get started:

1. Know where you'll put the nest. Read about other biological needs of your intended species, such as food and cover needs of young. For instance, the mallard hen and ducklings leave the nest together within 12 hours of hatching to look for nearby wetlands with emergent plants for cover and aquatic insects to eat.



Did You Know?

The decline of the pileated woodpecker almost led to the extinction of the wood duck from North America. Why? Wood ducks use the woodpecker's holes in trees for nests. Man made nest boxes have more recently come to the rescue.

2. Follow specific construction plans. Size of box, materials, size of the opening and other details are critical. For instance, if the precise opening isn't used, competitor birds will likely be more of a problem.

3. Think about aesthetics. Curved shapes and earth tones blend into the outdoors better than sharp angles and glossy paint.

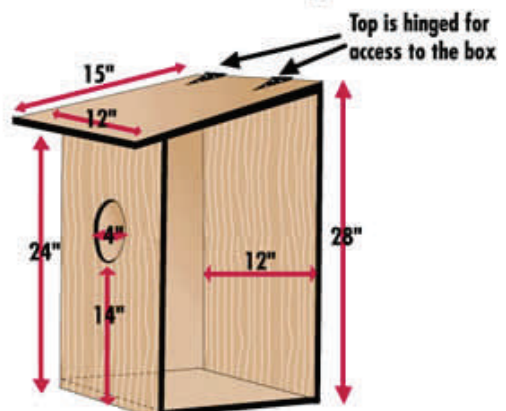
4. Plan now for maintenance. Lack of maintenance is the number one cause of failure for most nest structures. For instance, waterfowl don't carry nest material to their sites, so you have to do that for them.

5. Have some patience. Don't get discouraged if your nest isn't used immediately. Where birds aren't used to nest structures, it could be several years before they try them. Once they do, they and their offspring are likely to return year after year.



Properly built and placed, manmade nesting structures can be successful for wood ducks, mallards, Canada geese, bluebirds, kestrels, bats and screech owls.

Duck Nesting Box Section Drawing



Ready to build your own nest? Check out our website at www.duboisswcd.org for help in getting started! Choose the Backyard Conservation links to find details on how to build a duck nesting box like shown above.

What Do We Do About the Yellow Fields?

The abnormally wet spring here in Indiana and the Eastern Corn Belt has not only hampered planting, but it also has prevented timely weed burn down applications according to Bill Johnson, a Purdue Extension weed scientist.

A common problem in Indiana has been yellow fields caused by cressleaf groundsel, commonly known as ragwort, senecio, butterweed or “that mustard thing”. Rain kept farmers from controlling this weed with herbicides earlier this spring.

Johnson's full report on controlling groundsel, "What Do We Do About the Yellow Fields?" is available on the Purdue Extension weed science website at under the "Featured Articles" heading on the left side of the page.

According to Johnson, farmers have had “a lot of questions about controlling cressleaf groundsel because the excessively wet weather did not allow burn down applications to be made in late April. Now we have fields with groundsel, plus chickweed, henbit, deadnettle and winter annual grass at the seed set stage. Not to mention the summer annuals, such as giant foxtail, giant ragweed, common lambsquarters, black nightshade, pigweeds and waterhemp that have started to emerge.”

"Control of groundsel also will be a challenge since it is large, flowering and many of the lower leaves have fallen off of the plant, so herbicide uptake is limited by lack of leaf area."

Johnson's full report goes into great detail outlining multiple options for control of this weed. If farmers are battling flowering groundsel, Johnson says they could use glyphosate plus 2,4-D or Sharpen; or they can use Sharpen or 2,4-D plus paraquat and either Senecor for soybeans or atrazine for corn.

With the glyphosate-based program, he recommends farmers use the 1.5-lbs.-acid-equivalent/acre rate with 1 pt./acre of 2,4-D. Most 2,4-D labels require a seven-day waiting period before



Cressleaf groundsel is a common weed in Southern Indiana that can be difficult to control if not done in a timely manner.

planting corn or soybeans at this application rate. Johnson says this is why many growers should consider switching 2,4-D for Sharpen, which does not require a preplant interval.

In the paraquat-based program, Johnson says growers should use the upper end of the rate range for more effective large-weed control.

Now that all of the 2011 crops have been planted, Johnson says that farmers need to think about ways to prevent a repeat of excessive groundsel in 2012.

Because groundsel is primarily a winter growing plant, he recommends farmers look at the benefits of a fall-applied herbicide program containing the glyphosate and/or 2,4-D mentioned above.

To read Johnson's full article on controlling cressleaf groundsel, visit Purdue Extension's Weed Science website. You'll need Adobe's PDF Reader to view this file.

<http://www.btny.purdue.edu/weedscience/2006/GoundselControl06.pdf>

Why Should I Plant a Winter Cover Crop?

Why should I plant a cover crop? What are the advantages?

If you have ever been curious about cover crops, check out these great benefits!

Water erosion control

This is one of the two major reasons for growing winter cover crops in Indiana. Over 40 percent of our 13.5 million cropland acres have sufficient slope to be seriously damaged by water erosion if not adequately protected. As more and more of this sloping land is used for soybean production, the need for winter cover increases, since the soil after soybeans is much more erosive than after corn. Another situation that often calls for use of cover crops is where corn has been removed for silage.

Past research has shown that fields with winter cover plowed under in the spring have 55 percent less water runoff and 50 percent less soil loss annually than do fields with no winter cover. More recent studies show soil losses from corn or soybeans no-tilled into a vigorous growth of rye or wheat to be 90-95 percent less than soil losses from corn and soybeans conventionally tilled.

Wind erosion control

This is the second major reason for winter cover crops. Perhaps up to 1,000,000 acres of land in Indiana is subject to serious wind erosion damage if not adequately protected. These are primarily the coarse-textured soils (sands) and mucks that



Local farmer Dave Ring brought in an oilseed radish grown last year through the SWCD's cover crop program. Cover crops like this will aid in improving soil structure.

occur in north central and northwestern Indiana and along major rivers throughout the state. A cover crop left on the surface to be no-till planted is tremendously effective in controlling wind erosion.

Improved soil tilth

The added tilth from a winter cover crop, whether turned under or left on the surface, would benefit nearly all Indiana soils, but especially those having less than 2.5 percent organic matter in the plow layer. This characterizes the soils on at least one half of our cropland acres.

Improved crop yield

In recent Kentucky experiments, winter cover used with no-till planting markedly increased corn yield. For instance, 3-year average continuous corn yields were 8 bushels per acre greater when planted into a winter cover of rye and 25 bushels per acre greater when planted into hairy vetch than yields from plots without winter cover. The significantly higher yield in the hairy vetch cover plots was due primarily to the extra nitrogen (N) that this legume provides. All plots in the experiments had received 88 pounds of fertilizer N.

Other advantages

Cover crops recycle nutrients that might otherwise be lost to leaching during the winter and spring. Also, cover crops used in no-till production of corn or soybeans provide an excellent surface mulch after being killed with a contact herbicide; the mulch not only reduces soil erosion, but also slows evaporation of soil moisture, increases infiltration of rainfall, increases soil organic matter and aids in control of annual weeds. Additionally, cover crops can often be grazed by ruminant animals in the early spring before row crops are planted.

Story Courtesy Purdue University

Cover Crops Can Jump Start Transition to Continuous No-till

In the Midwest, about three-fourths of all soybeans and wheat are planted without prior tillage. But before corn is planted many fields are tilled in the fall and possibly tilled again in the spring. Farmers are tilling ahead of corn planting because they perceive a yield increase with tillage that is more than enough to cover the added direct costs for machinery, fuel, and labor. Typically, soybeans are no-tilled into corn stalks followed by soybean residue being tilled for corn planting the next year. No-tilling one year (for soybeans), then tilling the next (for corn), is not a true no-till system.

In many situations, corn yields drop slightly after switching to no-till. Since corn is a grass, it requires more nutrients (especially nitrogen) and water and corn responds well to tillage. Farmers typically see a 5–10% bushel yield decrease for the first 5–7 years after they convert from conventional tilled to no-till. The corn crop benefits from tilled soils due to the release of nutrients from soil organic matter. Tilling the soil injects oxygen into the soil, which stimulates bacteria and other microbes to decompose the organic residues and releases nutrients. Every 1% soil organic matter holds 1,000 pounds of nitrogen. However, continuous tillage oxidizes or burns up soil organic matter and soil productivity declines with time. Thus, tillage results in poor soil structure and declining soil productivity.



No-till corn planted into a winter cover crop.

Long-term research reveals that 7–9 years of continuous no-till produces higher yields than conventional tilled fields because it takes 7–9 years to improve soil health by getting the microbes and soil fauna back into balance, and start to restore the nutrients lost by tillage. In those transition years, the soil is converting and storing more nitrogen as microbe numbers and soil organic matter levels increase in

the soil. For the first several years after converting to no-till, there is competition for nitrogen as soil productivity increases and more nitrogen is stored in the soil in the form of organic matter and humus.

Cover crops have the ability to “jump-start” no-till, perhaps eliminating any yield decrease. Cover crops can be an important part of a continuous no-till system designed to maintain short-term yields and eventually increase corn yields in the long run.

Cover crops recycle nitrogen in the soil, help to build soil organic matter, and improve soil structure and improve water infiltration to improve no-till corn yields. Long-term cover crops can boost yields while improving soil quality and providing environmental and economic benefits. Growing cover crops is helping farmers adapt faster to a continuous no-till system, one that provides long-term economic and environmental benefits that are impossible to obtain by no-tilling one year at a time.

Legume cover crops, such as cowpeas and Austrian winter pea, can provide nitrogen to the following crop. Legume cover crops fix nitrogen from the air, adding up to 50–150 pounds per acre of this essential nutrient. Non-legume cover crops recycle leftover nitrogen from the soil, storing it in roots and above-ground plant material, where a portion will be available to the following crop. Every pound of nitrogen stored is a pound of nitrogen prevented from leaching out of the top soil into streams.

Growing a continuously living cover with no-till promotes healthy growing crops and reduces the problems most farmers have in growing crops with tillage (hard soil, cloddy soils, soil compaction, runoff, soil erosion, nutrient losses, annual weeds, insects, soil diseases). With all of these benefits, is it time for you to switch to continuous no-till?

Story Courtesy Ohio State University

Experts Say Soil Health Is Key to Profitable Farming

According to the National Weather Service, 2011 has been one of the wettest on record so far. And this can have major impacts on the land. According to a recent article from Purdue University, many farmers will be forced to make some tough decisions this fall when deciding on how to deal with the soil compaction issues they are facing. What can a farmer do to alleviate soil compaction and yet still maintain soil health?

That was one of the many subjects addressed at a recent workshop co-sponsored by the Dubois County SWCD. The SWCD partnered with other area SWCDs to bring in high quality speakers that spoke on the issue of soil health. Ray Archuleta, Conservation Agronomist at the NRCS East National Technology Center, spoke to this issue of soil compaction.

Archuleta showed that when farmers use tillage to try to alleviate soil compaction issues, those issues actually get much worse. That's because traditional tillage tools, like a moldboard plow or a disk rip-



Ray Archuleta spoke about soil health and no-till practices at the Soil Health Workshop on July 11th.

per, actually create a layer of soil compaction a few inches below the surface called a hardpan layer. This hardpan layer that Archuleta identified blocks the roots of a cash crop from going deeper into

the soil, and can actually decrease yields.

To make matters worse, Archuleta noted that each time the soil is tilled, the soil is robbed of its organic matter that makes it beneficial for growing cash crops. This is because tillage aids in destroying the living organisms in the soil that naturally produce and recycle the nutrients needed for a healthy soil. Speaking about tillage, Archuleta said, "you till, you kill."

So what is the answer? Consider the pictures below. A farmer could choose to use a disk ripper like the one pictured below to try to alleviate compaction, but it will only alleviate it for a short time before the issue is back. Rippers actually create soil compaction the more often they are used. But consider the value in planting a cover crop



Tillage radishes, like the one pictured above, are Mother Nature's natural plow. These radishes can grow to be over two feet in length and will tear through the hardpan layer left by traditional tillage tools, like the ripper pictured above. After the radishes winterkill and decay, the roots of the next cash crop planted will have new channels to grow through, allowing those roots to grow deep into the soil, potentially increasing yield.

like the tillage radish pictured below. These tillage radishes can grow to be well over a foot long, with some growing as large at two feet or greater in length!

Tillage radishes are Mother Nature's natural plows, tearing deep through the soil and

breaking through the hardpan layer, thus alleviating the soil compaction issue natu-

rally. This, in turn, makes channels deep into the soil that future cash crop roots can follow. When planted after harvest in the fall, tillage radishes will winterkill and decay in the spring, leaving precious organic matter in the soil.

According to Barry Fisher, State Agronomist for Indiana NRCS, integrating cover crops into a no-till farming operation is the best thing a farmer can do to alleviate soil compaction, build soil health and increase yield.

Consider Spencer County, Indiana farmer Paul Giles. Giles shared at the meeting that he has been no-tilling his land since the early 1980s. His land is made up of a heavy clay soil that many farmers would not want to do continuous no-till on. Because of his commitment to long term no-till practices and his use of cover crops each fall season, Giles has built up his organic matter to 3.12%! Because he has such healthy soil, in 2010 when rain was in short supply and a severe

drought was found over all of Southern Indiana, Giles still harvested between 195 to 235 bushels of corn per acre on most of his fields!

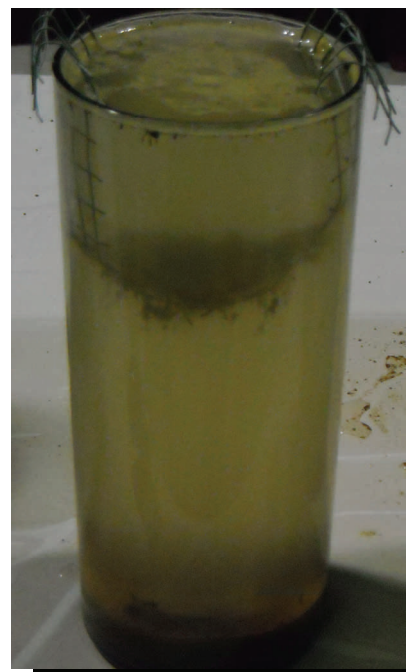
This size of yield seems large and unattainable to many

farmers. But according to Fisher, this can be the norm if farmers will commit to no-till practices long-term.

Also speaking at the workshop was Hanks Kok, Coordinator of the Indiana Conservation Cropping Systems Initiative. According to Kok, using cover crops during the fall to help rebuild organic matter in the soil is a great way to jump start the transition to no-till farming.

The Dubois County SWCD is currently planning a cover crop incentive program that will aid Dubois County landowners in applying cover crops to their land this fall. If you haven't tried no-tilling your cash crops recently, this could be an excellent way to kick start your no-till program. Anyone interested in the program should call the office at 812-482-1171 x3 for more details.

For a complete picture recap of the Soil Health Workshop, visit the SWCD's website at www.duboisswcd.org.



Ray Archuleta demonstrated soil health with an experiment using conventionally tilled soil (top) and no-tilled soil (bottom). The conventionally tilled soil broke apart when placed in water because there was no organic matter to hold it together. No-tilled soil held together and actually absorbed part of the water!

Proper Hay Storage Vital to Protecting Feed Quality

After a wet spring and delayed hay harvest, a Purdue Extension beef specialist says it is vitally important for beef producers to store hay properly to reduce nutrient loss.

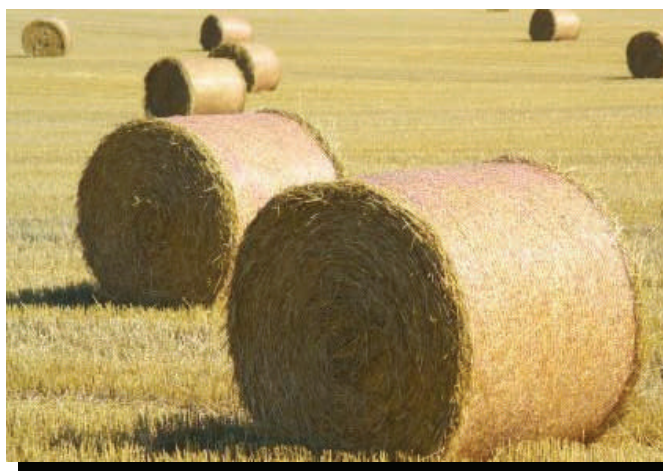
Much of the hay harvested now will be used as a main feed source this coming winter, said Ron Lemenager. Improper storage can lead to losses in weight or dry matter, as well as the vital nutrients required by animals – such as soluble energy, protein, vitamins and minerals.

"In an ideal world, producers would store hay bales inside," he said. "But, with most producers using large, round bales, that's often not possible."

For outdoor storage, Lemenager said protecting hay quality starts with baling. The

moisture level of the crop should be 15-18 percent.

Anything above 22 percent poses a spontaneous combustion risk from bacterial growth. The same is true for bales with



Keeping hay in the best possible condition is important in years like 2011 when a lower quality crop has been baled.

internal temperatures approaching 170 degrees, so producers making wet hay need to monitor bale temperatures, especially when hay is stored inside.

He also pointed out that farmers need to bale hay tightly and uniformly because tight, uniform bales shed water much better than loose, dipped or coned bales. And if using twine, farmers need to put enough on – every 6-8 inches – to securely hold bales together. Another option is to use net wrap instead of twine.

Once harvest and baling are complete,

producers need to consider storage site.

"It's important for the storage site to be well-drained," Lemenager said. "Farmers can use 1-2 inches of crushed rock to prevent moisture wicking into the bottom of bales. They also can store bales on top of old poles, tires or pallets to minimize ground contact."

Hay should not be stored in shaded areas, he said, and unless it is stored inside, bales should never be stacked because too much moisture gets trapped and causes spoilage.

The best way to store hay outdoors is to tightly pack bales end-to-end in a north-south orientation so the morning sun dries one side of the bales and the afternoon sun dries the other, Lemenager said.

Keeping hay in the best possible condition is especially important this year because the delayed first cutting means farmers are starting out with a lower quality crop. Should the wet spring be followed by a dry period, producers need to make sure they minimize loss from the first cutting because second and third cuttings may be lower-yielding or non-existent.

"Keeping what we've got is important," Lemenager said.



Which Type of Cover Crop Should I Plant?

A new online tool to help farmers decide which cover crops will benefit their row crop rotation is now available in Indiana.

Purdue University and the Midwest Cover Crops Council teamed up to release the MCCC Cover Crop Decision Tool, which uses consolidated cover crop information by state to assist farmers in making cover crop selections at the county level.

Developing information for each state were university researchers, Extension educators, Natural Resources Conservation Service personnel, state departments of agriculture personnel, crop advisers, seed suppliers and farmers. Purdue agronomy professors Eileen Kladvko and Keith Johnson contributed to the project.

"The MCCC hopes the cover crop selector tool will encourage the adoption of cover crops by providing the information

and decision-making help necessary for farmers to successfully integrate cover crops into their cropping systems," Kladvko said.

Users of the tool select their state or province and county. They also can give information on their cash crops, including planting and harvest dates, field information such as the soil drainage class, artificial drainage or flooding, and desired cover crop benefits.

Designed to be user-friendly, the tool allows users to immediately see how their input changes their cover crop options. Users can generate an information sheet for a selected cover crop that provides additional information and references relevant to application within the state or province.

A Natural Resources Conservation Service Innovation Grant, Michigan State University's Project GREEN -Generating Research and Extension to meet Economic and Environmental Needs - and the Great Lakes Regional Water Program fund the project.

Story Courtesy Purdue University



Cover Crops Pictured from Top to Bottom: Crimson Clover, Austrian Winter Peas, Oilseed Radish, Annual Ryegrass.

Midwest Cover Crops Council - Cover Crop Decision Tool
Indiana: Dubois County Seeding Dates

(C)Common Use, Considerable State Knowledge about species/use
(E)Emerging Use, Limited State Knowledge about species/use
Attribute Ratings: 6-Poor, 1-Fair, 2-Good, 3-Very Good, 4-Excellent

Reliable Establishment Freeze Risk to Establishment Frost Seeding

Cash Crop Growing Period: Requires Aerial Seeding or Interseeding of Cover Crop

Location Information
State/Province: Indiana
County: Dubois

Cash Crop Information
Date:
None or Prevented Planting
Plant Date:
Harvest Date:
Field Information
Soil Drainage Class: Moderately Well Drained
Flooding/Fording: No

Cover Crop Attributes
#1: Select an attribute
#2: Select an attribute
#3: Select an attribute

Cover Crops

Cover Crop	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Nonlegumes																								
Barley, Winter (C)																								
Buckwheat (C)																								
Millet, Japanese (C)																								
Millet, Pearl (C)																								
Oats (C)																								
Rye, Winter Cereal (C)																								
Ryegrass, Annual (C)																								
Sorghum-sudangrass (C)																								
Sudangrass (C)																								
Triticale, Winter (C)																								
Wheat, Winter (C)																								
Legumes																								
Radish, Oilseed (C)																								
Rapeseed/Canola (E)																								
Turnip, Forage (C)																								
Loganberries																								
Affalfa - Non-dormant (E)																								
Clover, Berseem (E)																								
Clover, Crimson (E)																								
Clover, Red (C)																								
Cowpea (E)																								
Pea, Field/Winter (E)																								
Sweetclover (C)																								
Vetch, Hairy (C)																								
Others																								
50% HV/50% WC Rye (C)																								
50% W Pea/50% OSR (E)																								
60% A Ryegrass/40% OSR (E)																								
60% Cr/40% A Ryegrass (E)																								
60% Cr/40% Oats (E)																								
60% Oats/40% OSR (C)																								

Select cover crop to create information sheet
50% HV/50% WC Rye Submit

Check Out the New Tool At:
<http://mcccdev.anr.msu.edu>

The tool is also linked under the Resources menu on the SWCD's website at www.duboisswcd.org

Backyard Conservation: Composting 101

Composting is a great way to recycle the plant debris in your garden, including both crops and weeds. It's easy to do--nature does it on its own all the time. But with proper management, you can help nature move along a little faster, if needed.

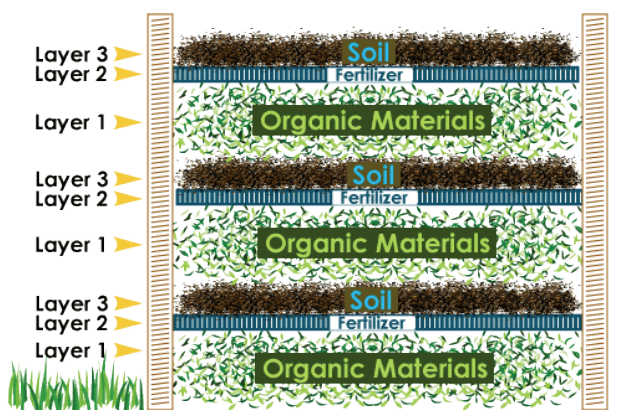
Compost returns some nutrients back to the soil, but the main benefit is in the improved soil structure. Adding organic matter, such as compost, will increase soil aeration and water-holding capacity, as well as increase the ability of a soil to hold additional nutrients for plants to take up later.

Having a compost bin or wall structure to contain the pile can help keep the pile in neat formation, but heaping the contents on the ground can work just as well. If a structure is used to contain the compost, removable horizontal slats will help make the structure adapt to the size of the pile, as it grows or shrinks, and will allow for easier turning.

To make your own compost, construct the pile in layers, beginning with about 6-8 inches of plant debris, such as dry leaves, lawn clippings and faded garden plants. After the plant debris, add a 2-inch layer of soil. Soil contains

microorganisms, which are responsible for breaking down organic matter.

The microorganisms will need nitrogen to break down the car-



Building a compost pile is simple. Start with a layer of organic materials such as yard debris, add a small amount of fertilizer to jumpstart the decay process and add 2-3 inches of soil on top. Keep layering until you reach the top of your bin or run out of materials.

bon in the plant material. Your pile already may have sufficient nitrogen, if there is a good balance of fresh green material, such as grass clippings, along with some dried material, such as dead leaves. If the pile is mostly dried plant material, sprinkle about a cup of commercial nitrogen fertilizer over a 25-square-foot compost pile in a layer between the plant debris and soil.

Manure is also an excellent source of nitrogen, and 1-2 inches of rotted manure can be substituted for the commercial fertilizer. Water the pile thoroughly, and then repeat each layer until the pile is a workable height.

As the materials decompose, the temperature in the center of a good-sized pile can reach as high as 160 F, which will kill off some disease organisms and weed seeds. The minimum -size pile for heat generation is about 3 feet by 3 feet by 3 feet. Moist compost will heat more uniformly, so be sure to water the compost occasionally if needed, but do not water-log the materials, as that will drive out much-needed air.

You can let nature take over from here, if you're not in a hurry. But, for faster results, you'll want to turn the pile about every month or so to allow more

even heating of the contents and to incorporate air into the center. Also, the more surface area the microorganisms have to work on, the faster the materials will decompose. It's like a block of ice in the sun: slow to melt when it is large, but melting very quickly when broken into smaller pieces. Chopping your garden wastes with a shovel or a machete, or running them through a shredding machine or lawnmower will increase their surface area, thus speeding up your composting.

You can start a compost pile any time of the year, but there are limitations during certain seasons. You can build your pile as materials become available. In the spring and early summer, high nitrogen

materials are available, but very little carbon materials are available unless you stored leaves from the fall. In summer you start to have garden debris, but your mowing may be lessened due to high summer temperatures. Fall is the time of year when both nitrogen from cool season lawn mowing and carbon from fallen leaves are readily available.

If you want to add to your pile, you can do so throughout the growing season and into the winter months. As you add fresh material, you will need to turn and water your pile more often. Monitoring the temperature and turning whenever the pile's temperature dips below 110°F keeps your pile active at its highest level, and you will have the fastest breakdown. This means turning the pile more often. This can be weekly and it is work! In reality, the average composter turns their pile once every 4 to 5 weeks. This mixes in the fresh material with the older, adds air to the pile and allows you to add water. With this method, a pile

started in the fall, added to and turned the following summer will be ready in late fall of that year or the next spring.

If you are not adding lots of new material, turn and water

“A pile started in the fall and turned the following summer will be ready in late fall of that year or the next spring.”

the pile 5-6 weeks after initial heating. Make sure to turn the outside of the old pile into the center of the new pile.

How much water should you add? The squeeze test is an easy way to gauge the moisture content of the pile. The organic material should feel damp to the touch, with just one or two drops of water expelled when squeezed tightly in the hand.

The right location is also important for a successful compost pile. Choose a level area with good drainage. Standing

water will slow down the pile. If possible avoid direct sunlight and areas exposed to strong winds, which can dry and cool the pile. A half day sun situation is ideal. A shaded area is fine

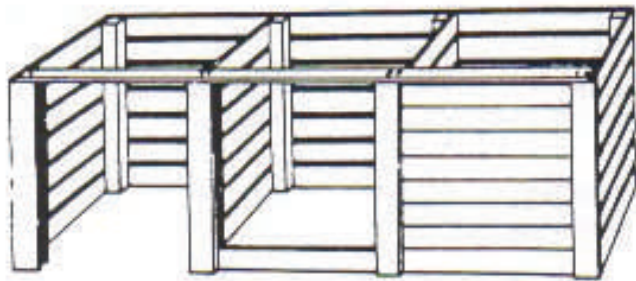
but pay attention to limited rainfall through a canopy of leaves, and slow drying out of a saturated pile. Some trees may send roots up into the pile in search of water and nutrients. When the pile is turned, these roots may be damaged. If your only location is near trees, you may want to consider setting a brick or stone foundation.

Don't place your pile directly against wooden buildings, fences or trees, because wood in contact with compost will decay. Avoid placing under a wide overhang that would limit rainfall, or under a drippy eave or rainspout that would continually saturate your pile.

Camouflaging a compost pile can be done in many creative ways. Surrounding the pile with tall flowers or plants or using a vine trellis are just a few examples of how to blend a compost pile into its surroundings.

Compost is ready to use when it's dark and crumbly and looks very much like good-quality soil. No telltale signs of the original material should be recognizable. Depending on outdoor temperatures and how well you tend the pile, your compost may be ready to add back to the garden by next spring.

Visit our website at www.duboiswcd.org for information on how to build a compost bin.



Ready to build your own compost bin? Check out our webpage at www.duboiswcd.org to get detailed plans on how to build the compost bin pictured above, as well as several other types of bins.



Dubois County Soil & Water Conservation District

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Check out our website!

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- ◆ Learn to identify invasive species
- ◆ Get help choosing a cover crop
- ◆ Learn how to submit a Rule 5 plan
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