

Let's Talk Gardening

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The Country Gardener

Hit the Ground Running

Now that what passes for fall here is upon us, it's time to hit the ground running at a full speed and start to get some serious gardening under way.

Let's start out with compost. If you've been putting all that stuff you collect from the yard into a compost bin or pen of some type, it's time to see what's become of it. If you don't shred it, you'll have to remove the top layers that are not decomposed yet; just lift them off and set them aside. Down toward the bottom of the pile, you're gonna see some brown, "garden gold" as it's called. You can't tell what it used to be any more--it might have been twigs, leaves, grass or kitchen scraps. It's just a brown, crumbly, moist mixture. In one word, it's COMPOST. Yeehaa!

It's what Mother Nature works all year to produce for you when she's left alone to do it. You can speed it up if you know how; speed it up to a process only taking about 9-10 weeks or maybe even faster if you know how. If you don't know and have a real hankering to know, just write me at the address below and I'll send you an article I wrote a few years ago that explains it. You don't need any fancy tumblers or barrels to do it; just some fence wire, a fork or shovel, and a water hose will do just fine.

I went to a class Monday at the Garden Center in San Antonio where Malcolm Beck talked about compost tea. In case you don't know who he is, look up "godfather of compost" in the dictionary and you'll find his picture and bio there. If you'd like more information about compost tea or compost, write to him at beckmalcolm@msn.com and he'll tell you all about it. Or better yet, buy his new book (for about \$20) and learn all kinds of stuff about not only composting, but also gardening the organic way. You'll be glad you did.

Just FYI, let me remind you that compost that has been made the "hot" way is disease-free, weed-free, and does wonders for your gardens. In addition, it lasts from several months to years in the soil, holds moisture, "loosens" the soil to provide pathways for air and water, reduces the need for pesticides in your beds, provides the micro-nutrients plants need (not available in many chemical fertilizers), balances the acidity of the soil, and converts soil chemicals into a form that plants can take up and use. It's hard to beat a deal like that.

The other speaker at the class Monday was a local expert on salvias. He has 50-60 or more different species in his yard and grows everything organically. Many of the salvias are native to our type of environment and most will do very well here, but some don't. Know your varieties or talk to the nursery sales people before you buy. The flower colors range from white through the reds and blues and yellows. He brought some interesting specimens with him. It's time now to cut these plants back if you want another flush of blooms this year. Cut them back by about 1/3 because most salvias bloom on the new growth. In a month or so, you'll get a whole new set of flowers.

By the way, these classes are offered the second Monday of every month; so if you're interested, call GVST at 210-522-9220.

Because I subscribe to several gardening publications, I get to read some interesting stuff about all kinds of gardening things. Just yesterday I read about a guy in North Carolina who grows his veggies in hay bales. It takes 11 days to get the bales ready, but then you just plant your veggies in the bales (or maybe ON the bales--whatever). Your veggies stay insect- and disease-free according to the author and you don't have to stoop over any more. You still have to water and fertilize, but you don't have to work the soil up in any way; the hay becomes the growing medium. It was kinda interesting and a novel approach. If you'd like more information, write me and I'll get it to you ASAP.

Send your ideas, questions, or comments to gardener@gvtc.com