

Short History of Compost

Compost was already known to the Romans and the Greeks and there are numerous references to the cultivation of the soil in the Bible. Our word *compost* comes from Old French but had various spellings: *compass*, *compass*, *compast*, *composture* and others.

Composting has been the basis of organic gardening and farming since the days of **Sir Albert Howard**, father of the organic method. Between 1905 and 1934 he devised **the Indore method** of compost making, in which materials are layered sandwich fashion, then are turned (or mixed by earthworms) during decomposition.

Austrian philosopher **Rudolph Steiner** outlined the principals of **biodynamic agriculture** in 1924, emphasizing composting as a central practice. For biodynamic farmers and gardeners compost making entails use of specific preparations, which are thought to inoculate it with beneficial organisms and stimulate their activity. Steiner promoted the idea of gardening in harmony with nature including the phases of the moon.

In 1942 **J. I. Rodale, pioneer of the organic method in America**, assimilated the ideas of Howard and adding knowledge gained by further experimentation.

Indore Method:

Materials are piled in alternating layers to make a 5 foot high stack. The pile is turned usually after 6 weeks and again after 12 weeks. Stacks are aerobic for a short period after piling and after each turn, but anaerobic otherwise. The chief advantage of this method as originally practiced is that it can be done on a fairly large scale without the need for great labor. This method might be described as falling on the mesophilic end of the composting spectrum.

The University of California Method

This was developed in the 1950s under Dr Golueke. In this method materials are being layered as well and the pile is built all at one time with a minimum volume of 1 cubic yard. Material size, C/N ratio, moisture levels and frequent turning are key elements. Turning is essential in the California method to prevent development of anaerobic conditions. This method aims for heat and fast decomposition.

Biodynamic Method

This method is similar to the Indore method in that it is also layered, partially anaerobic and slow acting. The main differences are that special preparations are being added to the pile at some point.

Here are some other methods of composting that are being practiced:

The City People's Method, Compost Tumblers, Compost in a Bag, Raised-Bin Method, Ogden's Step-by-Step Method, Pit Composting, Mulch and Sheet Compost, Trench and Posthole Composting, Anaerobic Composting