



TIP: Since your compost bucket will most likely live in your kitchen, choose any vessel with a lid that appeals to you. I found the never-used vintage chamber pot at left and gave it a new purpose in life. To avoid that sticky, gooey mess in the bottom of your compost bucket, take a newspaper and tear it in strips from the top down (for some reason, newsprint always tears in perfect strips!). Toss the strips into the bottom of the bucket and then start throwing your scraps in on top. The newspaper will compost right along with the food.

“COMPOST IS BEST AGED A LITTLE LIKE A FINE WINE. I MEAN, WOULD YOU PREFER TO DRINK A NICE '97, OR SOMETHING THAT WAS MADE LAST THURSDAY?”

— Author Unknown

A Few Tips for a Simple Life

by Michael Guilfoil, *The Spokesman-Review*

Organic farmer MaryJane Butters long ago embraced Thoreau's dictum to "simplify, simplify." As a Forest Service ranger in the 1970s, she spent two summers roaming Utah's Uinta Mountains with her home on her back. Later, she maintained the most remote wilderness ranger station in the Lower 48. Today, Butters and her family live eight miles outside Moscow, Idaho, on their farm, headquarters of her mail-order dry-foods business. But even e-commerce hasn't tempered Butters' enthusiasm for simplicity.

MaryJane's

2. Save Your Stuff

Compost is dark brown, crumbly soil made of rotting organic matter. It forms naturally nearly everywhere and is nature's way of recycling waste back into nutrition for plants and gardens. Save your fallen leaves, cut grass, and plant clippings and let natural occurrences of bacteria, fungi, and worms work their magic! Composters are available in all sizes and price ranges (starting at about \$30), from simple to advanced. It goes without saying—the more wholesome, chemical-free nutrients your soil receives, the healthier the food grown from it will be.

3. Bokashi

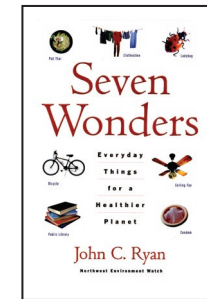
Unlike conventional composting, a Japanese method called *bokashi* actually ferments kitchen waste in a process similar to that of making wine, without producing any "rotten" odor. The how-to is simple: place any kind of food scraps (even meat and dairy products) in a specialized bucket, and add a powdered culture mix made from wheat bran, molasses, and microorganisms. In just days, your food waste will be converted into rich nutrients to feed your soil. Learn more and shop for your own Bokashi system (\$120) at www.bokashicycle.com.

4. Easy as 1, 2, 3

A higher-tech kitchen composting solution is an automatic composter. The NatureMill Automatic Composter (www.naturemill.com) is a sleek, attractive, indoor container that uses minimal electricity as it controls the temperature, air flow, moisture, and mixing of food waste to simplify and accelerate the composting process. This is a more expensive option (starting at \$199), but it's also super-low maintenance. All you do is deposit food waste (up to 120 pounds per month) and forget it until the indicator light comes on, roughly every two weeks. Easy!

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In December 1999, a newspaper reporter from Washington called. He was writing a review of the book *Seven Wonders: Everyday Things for a Healthier Planet* by John C. Ryan. Michael Guilfoil of *The Spokesman-Review* newspaper asked me if I had my own "seven wonders." The story that ensued was

headlined "Simple Solutions." Here, then, is the continuation of that story. Each issue of *MaryJanesFarm* will feature in detail new solutions, and will give you all the information you need to make them your own.

Solutions from previous issues are available in the magazine section of my website: www.maryjanesfarm.org/SimpleSolutions.



7 Methods for Compact Composting

It's time to give some serious thought to your garden—no matter how petite your plot. Anything grand needs good soil to grow, and the best soil is the soil you make. If making soil sounds out of your league—it's not! You don't need farm experience, a tractor, or even a back yard. You can convert food scraps (and even dog poop!) into compost, the most critical component of fertile soil.

1. Come on, Comfrey!

The leaves of comfrey, a perennial flowering herb with topical medicinal qualities, break down quickly and make nutrient-rich compost—see p. 64 for more about composting (and healing) with comfrey.

seven wonders

5. Happy Worms

Vermicomposting is a fancy term for using earthworms to convert food scraps to compost. Worms might make you squirm, but this natural method isn't as gross as it sounds. The Worm Factory composting systems (starting at \$90) from Nature's Footprint (www.naturesfootprintinc.com) make it easy. Simply add a handful of worms and your organic waste to the bottom tray. Once that's full, begin another. Worms migrate up to the newest food source, leaving nutrient-rich compost beneath. It's odor-free, and the worms will keep happily to themselves.

6. Good Dog!

An in-ground pet waste composter that empties itself?! Yes, please! The "Doggie Dooley Toilet" (www.cleanaingardening.com) turns Fido's mess into a healthy fertilizer for your yard, with minimal odor and effort. Just dig a hole, insert their in-ground container, scoop in the poop using the handy foot-operated lid, add special "digester bacteria," and you're done. The digested compost drains back into the soil and ... voila! A clean, fertilized yard, all for just \$36.

7. Ok, you've got compost ... now what?

When you're ready to put your compost to good use, mix about one part compost with three parts organic potting or topsoil and start planting. Compost can also be spread around existing plants, bushes, and trees. Making more compost than you can use? Scatter it in the yard, share it with friends and neighbors, or donate it to a local community garden.

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