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# CAN YOU DIG IT?

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Welcome to my  
new **FREE**  
Monthly

Texas Organic  
Gardening  
Newsletter!



## Special Interest Articles:

- What are the best Composting Gadgets? pg. 2
- Are You Feeding Hummingbirds Correctly? pg. 3

## Links:

- [Can You Dig It? blog](#)
- [My articles on the Dave's Garden website](#)

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## Tomatoes in November!

If you play your cards right and Mother Nature cooperates, then yes, you can have homegrown tomatoes into November in North Central Texas!

**The time to start tomato seeds is now.** Your plants should start flowering in September and will continue producing fruit for a couple of months, barring any early freezes. (Keep some frost cloth handy, just to be safe.)

What varieties are best for our area? Well, you can't go

wrong with cherry tomatoes; they grow fast and offer vigorous fruit production. 'Celebrity', 'Carnival' and '444' are also often recommended for Texas' scorching summers and make wonderful sauces, if you're planning on going that route.

However, for fall tomato growing, you can give yourself a little more latitude. Hot temperatures, which slow fruit development, aren't as much of a problem. So, be adventurous: try starting

seeds of one of the hundreds of heirloom varieties like **Cherokee Purple** or **Black Krim**. They are beautiful when ripe and the flavor is unparalleled.



Several local nurseries also offer tomato transplants in the fall, but your choices will be somewhat limited.

## Why Aren't You Composting?

It's easy, it drastically cuts down on the amount of garbage sent to the landfill, and it makes the BEST fertilizer...all absolutely free.

Yet, even some savvy gardeners seem daunted by composting. Here's a fast and simple way to get started:

1. Choose a remote area of your yard, about 3' x 3', to start your pile. Avoid positioning your pile up against a wood fence, however. Surround it with lightweight wire fencing that's easy to move, if you like.

Your pile does need to be accessible.

2. The best compost is a mixture of **green** and **brown** materials. Greens include grass clippings, manures and vegetable and fruit scraps. Browns to use are chopped leaves, shredded newspapers or sawdust.

Here are some recipes and ratios to get you started:

**Recipe #1:** Four parts kitchen scraps from fruits and vegetables, 2 parts chicken or cow manure, 1 part shredded newspaper (black ink only),

and 1 part shredded dry leaves.

**Recipe #2:** Two parts kitchen scraps, 1 part chicken manure, and 1 part shredded leaves.

**Recipe #3:** Two parts grass clippings, 1 part chicken manure, and 1 part shredded leaves.

In order for your pile to properly "cook", it should be at least 3' high. It should also be watered and turned and/or poked regularly.

(See **Composting**, next page)

**The 'Divine' Gardener**



*"My whole life has been spent waiting for an epiphany... the kind of transcendent, magical experience that lets you see your place in the big picture. And that is what I had with my first compost heap. I love compost and I believe that composting can save not the entire world, but a good portion of it."*

--**Bette Midler**, in a Los Angeles Times interview

**Composting (cont'd)**

**More Good Stuff:**

- Used coffee grounds and paper filters (Starbucks bags and gives away their old grounds...just ask!)
- Rinsed and crushed eggshells
- Shredded brown paper bags
- Old bread
- Bunny or chicken poop
- Bagged, composted cow or horse manure.

**Compost No-Nos**

- Meats, oils, fish, dairy products, and bones
- Weeds
- Diseased plants
- Any herbicide-treated lawn refuse
- Dog, cat, or pig feces

**Troubleshooting**

A healthy compost pile has a wonderful Earthy fragrance. If your pile smells bad, cut

down on watering. If you get fire ants nesting in it, add more water. If the ingredients aren't breaking down very fast, mix in a bunch of grass clippings.

Finished compost is consistently dark brown and crumbly (although eggshells may still be visible – they take longer to break down). Use it on your lawn, in flower beds or mixed with potting soil.

**Composting Gadgets**



**Kitchen Composter**

Keep one under the kitchen sink to collect fruit, vegetable scraps and coffee grounds. Most types include a carbon filter to block odors.

**Bio-Bag Kitchen Compost Pail Liners**

Made from corn, these biodegradable bags do a great job of keeping your under-sink kitchen compost bucket clean.



**Compost Thermometer**

Make sure your compost is cooking properly! Use this ultra-long thermometer to conduct periodic checks on your pile's heat level.

**Online Compost Accessory Suppliers**

**CompostBins.com**

[CompostBins.com](http://CompostBins.com)

Specializing in outdoor compost bins and accessories, as well as vermiculture (worm bin) supplies and much more!



[PlanetNatural.com](http://PlanetNatural.com)

A wide variety of natural products for the organic gardener. [Free catalog.](#)

## Help for Hummers

Want to attract hummingbirds to your yard?

You don't need a fancy, expensive feeder – one of the plastic red and clear designs from the local Big Box store works great.

The important thing is hygiene. You **MUST** keep the feeder clean, especially during the heat of summer. Nectar can mildew quickly in temperatures over 80°. Use the following recipe to make homemade nectar.

Completely clean your feeder every 4 days and refill with fresh nectar.

**FORMULA:** 4 parts water to 1 part sugar. The water should not be distilled. The sugar should be white table sugar, not turbinado sugar, brown sugar, or other forms. Use no artificial colors (red dye does NOT because help attract hummingbirds) or other additives. *Never* use honey or artificial sweeteners, for to do so may kill the birds.

**PREPARATION:** The ingredients can be mixed using cold water. Experience has shown that mixtures do not go bad as quickly if the water is boiled, and the sugar added to it. Do not continue to boil the mixture, as it will turn to syrup. Unused

portions of a mixture can be stored in the refrigerator for up to a week.

**FEEDER MAINTENANCE:**

Any mixture of sugar and water will ferment and host the growth of mold spores. Regardless of the mixture's age, discard it immediately if you see cloudiness or you see mold growing in the feeder. Always clean a feeder thoroughly before refilling; do not "top off" a feeder which is low in mixture. Clean with warm water and detergent, and rinse very thoroughly. Every few weeks, rinse the cleaned feeder with white vinegar.



## Product Review: Neuton Electric Lawn Mower

I feel lucky to live in an environmentally-progressive city like Plano, Texas. We can collect just about everything for recycling here. And this past summer, the city sponsored a [lawn mower exchange program](#), an event that is gaining popularity in areas across the nation.

In a nutshell, the program encourages citizens to turn in their gas mowers and receive a substantial discount on a brand new electric mower.

After struggling for several years with a heavy, fumey

Scotts mulching mower, I convinced my husband it was time to go the green route.

I did some research (the city was offering several different brands in the exchange) and decided on the [Neuton CE 6](#), a cordless electric mower that operates on a battery.

It's been three months and we're pretty happy with the Neuton's performance. It cuts well overall and is SO much easier to maneuver than the heavy old gas mower. And no endless tugging on a pull chord! The power isn't quite

as good, however, so it chokes quickly in thick, damp grass.

A fully charged battery allows for 45-60 minutes of mowing time.

Visit the [Neuton web site](#) for more information.

