Compost is one of the Three Rs. Adding kitchen scraps to the pile is an excellent way to recycle back into your garden.

Abundant Living Through Permaculture

Story by Mark Carter

State-by-State Gardening

If you're reading this article, chances are you're an avid gardener. I don't know about you, but it's been a tough year for me and my garden. Between late freezes and record-setting drought, it's been a real challenge. Just getting enough water on the lawn and the basic landscape has been almost impossible. It's to the point in many areas that drought and watering restrictions have all but shut down the practice of gardening.

I have been gardening my entire life and if there is one thing I've learned, it's this: without nature's help, we cannot succeed! If gardeners are to continue their activities in our changing environment, we must work more closely and consciously *with* nature, not *against* nature. To do that, we will have to change some of our assumptions and practices.

PERMACULTURE: A PLAN FOR THE FUTURE

Permaculture(n): A self-sustaining agricultural system – that is what you will find if you look the word up in a dictionary. If you analyze this word, you get a clearer picture: PERMAnent and agriCULTURE or PERMAnent CULTURE.

Permaculture design principles extend from a position well stated by Bill

Mollison. Addressing the need for conservation of resources, Mollison said, "The only ethical decision is to take responsibility for our own existence and that of our children." In simple terms, permaculture is about designing a landscape that is low-maintenance and that is ecologically friendly and practical, one that respects the environment. For instance, permaculture design creates a drought-tolerant, hardy landscape that conserves and reuses the natural resources on your property. It includes such tactics as catching and reusing rainfall, composting and mulching plant waste and debris, producing food in a minimum space with a minimum of chemical or inorganic additives.

THE THREE Rs

An easy way to remember the permaculture design principles is to remember The Three Rs: **R**educe water use, **R**euse rainwater and **R**ecycle all you can back into your garden.

Let's look at a few practical examples of things any gardener can do right now to get started in this exciting way of landscape stewardship.

INSTALL A RAIN BARREL

A rain barrel collects and stores rainwater from your rooftop to use later in your watering chores. It saves money and time and is ecologically friendly and effective.

• One rain barrel can save approximately 1,300 gallons of water for reuse during peak summer months!

• A rain barrel reduces water pollution by reducing stormwater runoff, which generally contains pollutants that end up in steams, killing off naturally helpful organisms and destroying water quality.

Storing rainwater for garden use helps to recharge groundwater naturally.Rain barrels are inexpensive and

easy to build and install. (see sidebar)

START A COMPOST PILE

It's quick, easy and costs nothing to get started! Compost is one of nature's best mulches and soil amendments and the gardener can organize his gardening around it, instead of depending solely on chemical fertilizers. Compost improves soil structure, texture and the water-holding capacity. Compost loosens clay soils and helps sandy soils retain water. The organic matter in compost provides food for micro organisms, which, in turn, keep the soil in a healthy, balanced condition. Nitrogen, potassium and phosphorus are produced naturally by the feeding of microorganisms, so few or no artificial amendments will be needed.

It's easy to get started. Save those kitchen scraps and add them to the compost pile. Kitchen scraps are typically high in nitrogen, which helps heat up the compost pile and speed up the composting process. Egg shells, coffee grounds, fruit and vegetable peels are good candidates for the compost pie.

With a compost pile, bigger is often better. Heat builds up with a big pile. You don't want to get much bigger than about 3 feet square, though. Multiple piles might be in order.

Aerate your compost! If you are composting with a pile or in a static (nontumbling) compost bin, be sure to mix up



BUILD YOUR OWN RAIN BARREL

- Tools and supplies needed:One 55 gallon drum
- One 6-inch skimmer basket
- (a basket used in a pool skimmer)
- One spigot and fittings and bulkhead
- A section of garden hose and fittings
 One section of 2-inch flex pipefittings and bulkhead
- One downspout connector & section of 4-inch corrugated pipe
- A drill w/ hole saws, hack saw, silicone & measuring tape.

Instructions:

Locate a good area for the barrel. Set the barrel on one or more cinder blocks to build pressure through height. Next, take a 55-gallon drum, cut the hole in the top for the skimmer basket to fit the 4-inch correlated pipe. The line will drain into the barrel through this basket. Cut holes for the upper and lower drains and install bulkheads, hardware and plumbing. Attach a water hose to the lower spigot. Now you're in business! It's that simple!

> You must install an overflow drain in the top/side of your rain barrel. You can direct this overflow water in many helpful ways, I use mine to keep my pondless waterfall topped off.

> > Drill your lower hole as low as possible. Install a good spigot too. This one will last for years to come.

Here's the finished product. I will dry stack field stone around the base to conceal the concrete blocks and then you will have a very functional AND a very attractive rain barrel!



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the contents so oxygen is always available to speed the decay process. Insert a few pipes to get oxygen to the core, and turn the pile with a pitch fork from time to time.

Keep the compost damp. Never let the compost dry out. A compost pile needs moisture to keep the composting process active. Yet it needs to be *moist*, not *wet* or *water-logged*.

Maintain a mix of green and brown material. Too much of any one material will slow down the composting process. If you have all leaves, all grass clippings or an overload of any other single type of material, it will throw off the balance of the pile.

CREATE SHADE COVER AND FOOD

Plant trees to provide shade for you and your home. Not only will a big beautiful shade tree provide leaf matter for the compost heap, it will provide food for the animals, a great wind and sound break and will save you big dollars on summer cooling bills. If the trees are deciduous, they will work in winter too, admitting the warming rays of the sun.

The term *synergy* is a key element in the practice of permaculture and refers to the working together of two or more things to produce an effect greater than the sum of their individual effects. For instance, plant some fruit trees and some synergetic plants to increase their abundance. Underplant your fruit trees with plants like leeks, which are edible and repel moles, yarrow and purple coneflowers, which attract bees for pollination. You can also compost all of these things back into your garden! Synergy at it's best!

JUST DO IT!

Permaculture isn't really a new idea or principle. Its elements go far back in garden practice. Many highly civilized peoples have never stopped practicing them. In the U.S., however, we have had such vast amounts of land that perhaps conservation seemed unnecessary. Moreover, the vastness of the land led very early to the industrialization of agriculture, which ultimately called for non-organic gardening practices. The idea of stewardship of the land, once a staple in the mind of the South, fell by the wayside. The recent droughts, however, have reminded us of the value of older, time-proven practices and have made us newly aware of the need to conserve our resources.

If each of us works to preserve the natural resources within our own properties, we will all be a happier, healthier people and we will provide a model for future generations. Through simple, practical permaculture practices, we can create the life abundant without destroying our resources for the future.

Mark Carter is an award-winning landscape designer and owner of Carter's Nursery, Pond and Patio, Inc. in Jackson, Tennessee, specializing in custom water features and outdoor living areas.