

Healthy Home and Garden Tips

Composting with leaves

Every fall the big leaf maple in my front yard gifts me with car-sized piles of leaves. The sight brings much excitement as my children eagerly await the signal to dive head first into the mounds. After the fun is over, I will shred the leaves and use them as a natural mulch in my garden. A thick layer of leaves protects my plants from the cold and provides excellent habitat for red wigglers, a worm that turns decaying matter into a nutrient-rich amendment. Later this winter I will collect some of the red wigglers from under the leaves to start an indoor worm composting bin. Tucked under my kitchen sink, this small bin is the perfect place to compost my fruit and veggie scraps. Done right, I will have nutrient-rich compost to feed my potted plants this spring.



Tips for winter mulching

1. Save time by allowing fallen leaves to remain on bare soil.
2. Apply 4-6 inches of mulch to protect the soil and roots from winter weather.
3. Prevent plant disease by leaving space between the plant stem and mulch.
4. Cover frost tender root crops completely with mulch during extreme cold and uncover when conditions improve.
5. Choose tougher mulch, like wood chips, for better weed suppression.
6. Pull existing weeds before spreading mulch to reduce weed growth in the spring.

Building a worm bin

Materials:

- Red worms
- Plastic tub (with lid) between 8 and 16 inches deep
- Catchment tray
- Bedding
- Fruit and vegetable scraps
- Drill

Directions:

- Drill holes in the bottom and sides of the tub for ventilation and drainage.
- Fill the container three-quarters full with moistened bedding (shredded newspaper, brown leaves, straw, wood shavings)
- Add the worms
- Pull aside some of the bedding and put in some food scraps about once a week, and cover them up with bedding each time.

Learn more about composting at oregonmetro.gov/worm-composting

Recycling your holiday lights

The dark days of winter seem a little less gloomy with warm ambient light to brighten my home. The soft glow of candle light and the magical charm of hundreds of twinkle lights combine to create a cozy atmosphere. My old traditional lights were definitely at the end of their life span so I decided to replace them this year with more energy efficient LEDs. My old lights won't go into the trash though. String lights are not bio-degradable and will not decompose in the landfill. They can't go into the recycle bin either. The cords can easily tangle in the rotating machinery at the recycling plant, breaking equipment and endangering lives. Instead, I will take the lights to a nearby recycling center so the valuable copper inside of them can be reclaimed.



Find a recycle center near you

Live in the Metro region?

Learn more at oregonmetro.gov/askmetro

Outside the Metro region?

Check with your local solid waste jurisdiction

Ask Metro

Learn more:

oregonmetro.gov/garden

oregonmetro.gov/healthyhome

oregonmetro.gov/askmetro

youtube.com/user/OregonMetroGov

Homemade Beeswax Candles

Ingredients:

- 1 pound beeswax
- ½ cup coconut oil
- 3 half-pint canning jars
- 1-2 tablespoons essential oil (optional)
- Medium cotton wicks with wick tabs attached (at least 6 inches in length)
- Wick stickers
- Double broiler

Directions:

- Attach one of the wick stickers to the bottom of the wick tab.
- Peel the paper off the exposed side of the wick sticker and attach wick to the bottom center of the jar.
- Melt wax and oil in double broiler
- Add essential oils (if desired) after wax has melted.
- Stir the beeswax, coconut oil and essential oil together.
- Pour into the glass jars.
- Set the wick so it is in the center. Secure it by placing a wooden skewer across the jar and taping the wick to it.
- To prevent cracking, place candles in a warm area to harden.
- Allow the candle to cure for two days and then trim wick to about ½ inch.

Notes:

- During the first burn keep you candle lit until the entire surface has melted to prevent tunneling.
- Beeswax is flammable so watch it carefully during the heating process.