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ADEQ ENCOURAGES BACKYARD COMPOSTING

Have a rake and a yard full of leaves? Then start composting. It’s really that easy for Arkansans to begin a composting operation in their own backyards. Even one pile of leaves makes a lasting environmental benefit. Larger compost piles that consist of a variety of organic materials go even farther by benefiting soil and plants and keeping materials out of the local solid waste stream.

Using compost can save money, too. Nutrient-rich compost can be used in place of fertilizer or other soil additives.

The Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality encourages everyone in the Natural State to compost yard wastes and other organic materials, whether it be raking up backyard leaves or constructing a pile with layers of materials.

“It’s said that composting is nature’s way of recycling,” said Teresa Marks, director of the Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality. “It turns what would be a waste product into a valuable resource, and you can make your composting operation as simple or as complex as you want it to be.”

Yard waste and food waste combined account for about a quarter of all trash disposed of by households each year. Composting that material – estimated at 1,000 pounds per household per

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year, according to the Environmental Protection Agency – would reduce a burden on local solid waste agencies. Those agencies would likely spend tax dollars chipping or composting the yard waste themselves.

Yard waste, unlike food waste, is prohibited by law from Arkansas landfills. ADEQ does not consider burning yard waste a suitable option, since burning yard waste causes air pollution and could adversely impact human health. Burning other wastes violates state law.

Compost is decomposed organic material that contains properties beneficial to plants. It’s used by gardeners, landscapers and farmers to condition soil.

All kinds of organic material may be composted, such as leaves, grass clippings and tree trimmings to cardboard and newspapers.

Composters can speed up the decomposition by building a pile or bin layered with materials. The pile should include at least one layer of soil, which contains the bacteria necessary to speed the decomposition rate.

For quick compost, combine carbon- and nitrogen-based materials such as leaves and grass, or simply, “browns” and “greens.” A typical compost formula calls for one-half to three-quarters browns to one-fourth to one-half greens.

Watering the pile or bin frequently and turning the layers of material also speeds up the process. If watered and maintained after being initiated in the fall or winter, compost should be ready by spring gardening season.

The process generates heat, so composting is complete when the organic materials have broken down and no heat can be detected.

Food waste should always be covered in any compost pile in order to keep away pests.

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Composters should not put meat or dairy waste into a bin or pile because of possible odors.

More composting instructions and tips are available on multiple Web sites, including the ADEQ site, www.adec.state.ar.us and the University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service site, www.uaex.edu.