Making Good Dirt

Gardening is a hot topic these days. Every year, more people are getting involved in community gardens, community supported agriculture (CSA) programs, local food movements, and more. Whether you're starting a small container herb garden on your porch or getting involved in a larger gardening project, there are few things more important to growing healthy plants than soil.

First and foremost, if you are planning to grow in the ground, get your soil tested so you know what the pH of your soil is and what nutrients you may be lacking. For more information on soil testing, check out the Clemson University cooperative extension website http://www.clemson.edu/extension/hgic/plants/other/soils/hgic1652.html

Secondly, plants need nutrients throughout their growing season, and a great way to help provide those nutrients is to compost. A compost pile or bin is basically a way to speed up decomposition, the breakdown of organic matter into nutrient rich soil. Composting is an easy way to save money in your garden by reducing the need to purchase soil amendments. Also, by composting leftover food, dryer lent, toilet paper tubes, pet hair, and other organic items, you are keeping them out of the landfill.

In order to compost, you need 5 main ingredients; greens (Nitrogen rich items like leftover fruits and vegetables), browns (Carbon rich items like dried leaves), air, water, and a place to put your compost. If you live in a small space, like an apartment, you may want to try a small vermiculture system that uses worms to help break organic matter. If you have a large backyard, then a simple enclosure made from wood or bricks may work well for you.

Getting started composting is really simple and great for your garden and the environment. For more information on how to start a compost system, check out this article http://www.thegardenofoz.org/composting101.asp

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