

Composting - the easier way



John Griggs
Monongalia County, WV Master Gardener

We are all looking for easier, yet just-as-good, ways of doing things. The problem is that the idea comes just at the time we need to put it into practice. This year I was looking for an easier way to handle the end-of-season composting and decided to try an idea that has rattled around in my head for several years.



Picture 1: Snow fencing rolled out for measuring and cutting to length.

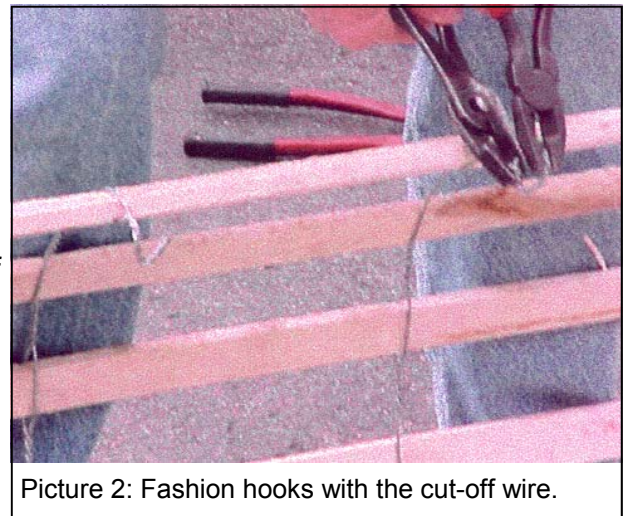
Most people, including myself, get tired of seeing the compost bins made of free wood shipping pallets every day during the winter. This year, I purchased a 50' roll of 48" high snow fencing and proceeded to make four portable (and "put-awayable" in the off-season) compost bins.

The idea is simply this: cut the 50' roll into four 12'6" lengths. Remove one wood stave from the end of each 12' section to allow extra wire on one end of each bin. Then fashion the cut off wire ends into "hooks," so that the fencing can hook onto itself and form a circular bin.

This size fencing has five lines of wire. Cut off the wire tail on the middle row and fashion hooks on the other four rows to connect the two ends together by bending the wire tail to go around behind the in-line wire of the other end. With the

top hook facing DOWN, and the next lower hook facing UP the two hooks combine to "seize" the alternate end of the fencing. Repeat this pattern on the lower end of the fencing, giving 4 hooks, two (top and bottom) facing into the center and two (the #2 from the top and bottom) facing to the edge of the fencing. When assembling the bin, overlap the two end staves hooking the wire just beyond the first stave of the end of the fencing. The completed

compost bin is a closed cylinder, approximately 4' in diameter and 4' high, which is almost double the 3'x3'x3' cube considered to be the smallest compost pile that will heat. If it is filled with brown leaves, adding some 46-0-0 to increase N will start the cooking process.



Picture 2: Fashion hooks with the cut-off wire.



Picture 3: Completed and filled bin.

For those few of us who really do turn the pile as it cooks, the fencing can easily be unhooked, removed, placed adjacent to the fallen pile, and reassembled. Shoveling the pile back into the bin effectively turns it over. Combining the contents from two bins as the cooking lowers the amount of material in each bin further accelerates the cooking process.