

## COMPOSTING

### **Reasons to Compost**

Home composting recycles urban green-waste and saves valuable space in landfills. Based on a 1992 study, 30 percent of what goes into landfills is organic, 60 percent if you add paper. Every year Americans dispose of 24 million tons of leaves and grass clippings. California Assembly Bill 939, passed in 1989, mandated a 50 percent reduction of material going to landfills by the year 2000. A statewide diversion rate of 42 percent was reached in 2000 and the amount of waste dumped in landfills decreased by only 13 percent.

Adding compost to soil increases the level of microbial activity. This helps plant-roots absorb nutrients. The organic matter helps improve soil structure, water retention, and aeration. Many micronutrients are chemically bound up in the soil which makes them unavailable to plants. Composting converts micronutrients in organic debris (iron, manganese, zinc, and copper) into a form plants can use. It also improves soil chemistry so that nutrients are more available to plants.

Compost provides food for earthworms, which live and multiply. Earthworms, in turn, help to aerate the soil and their castings contain nutrients which plants can absorb. It has been shown that plants grown in soils amended with compost tend to be healthier, have increased drought tolerance, and are more resistant to some pests and diseases. Composting decreases the amount one needs to spend on soil amendments and will lessen the need for chemical fertilizers. Overuse of chemical fertilizers (containing nitrogen and phosphorous) can cause serious water pollution problems. This results in an overgrowth of algae, fish deaths, and other adverse effects on natural ecological systems.