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## Recycling 101: Make a compost pile

By BEN WOLFE

Although many people do not know it, an easy method of recycling can be carried out at their own home using household wastes. On average, each rural or suburban household produces about 6,000 pounds of yard waste per year. By collecting and properly composting these wastes, anyone can transform trash into a gardener's treasure.



The first step to creating a compost pile is finding a location for a compost bin that will hold materials to be composted. Some factors that should be considered when choosing the location for a compost bin include accessibility to the pile, drainage of the surface of the location and easy access to a source of water for wetting down the pile. The pile should also be located in a place where it will not be dried out by the sun or

wind. The basic design of any composting bin should be based on the amount of yard and kitchen wastes that will be composted. The compost pile should be at least one cubic yard. This size allows the pile to retain moisture and be easily aerated. The bin should also provide easy access to the finished compost. Many different bin designs have been developed for the specific needs of the composter. Plans can be accessed on the Internet or can be obtained from organic gardening books.

Once the site and design for the compost bin have been chosen, the bin can be constructed or purchased from a home improvement or gardening store. When constructing a bin, it's easy and inexpensive to use materials that may already be in the possession of the composting household. These may include concrete blocks, bales of hay, hog wire, or wooden pallets. When purchasing a bin, the same factors as for constructing a bin must be considered.

When the composting bin is ready for filling, a 4" to 6" layer of twigs should be placed on the bottom of the bin. The twigs will help to aerate the bottom of the pile. At this point, the compost ingredients can be placed in the bin. As materials are added, the pile should be moistened. When the bin is filled, add a layer of soil to the top of the pile to help it retain moisture and to introduce microorganisms that will decompose the pile. To maintain the pile, the moisture level should be monitored. If a handful of the material of the pile is picked up, it should almost drip when it is held. It should have the feeling of a wrung-out sponge. A cover can be placed over the pile to help it retain moisture, but this is not usually necessary. If the compost pile in the bin is stirred as the pile "bakes" it will shorten the time period required for the compost to be made. To stir the pile, the materials on the outside of the bin must be moved to the inside of the pile and the inside materials must be moved to the outside. If the pile is stirred every week, it will take only one to two months for the pile to be ready otherwise it will take six to 12 months.

The finished compost will appear to be a dark crumbly soil with small pieces of organic material throughout. The nutrient-rich compost can be used to feed hungry plants.

During the next month, take some time to research and design your own compost bin. The results of your work will prove to be worth the effort, and your organic recycling efforts will be a benefit to yourself and to the environment.

*Editor's Note: Ben Wolfe was a senior at Lake-Lehman High School when this article was written. He was instrumental in starting the school's first recycling program, and in gaining a \$2,000 state grant to fund it.*

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## Make your kitchen or bathroom reflect your personal tastes

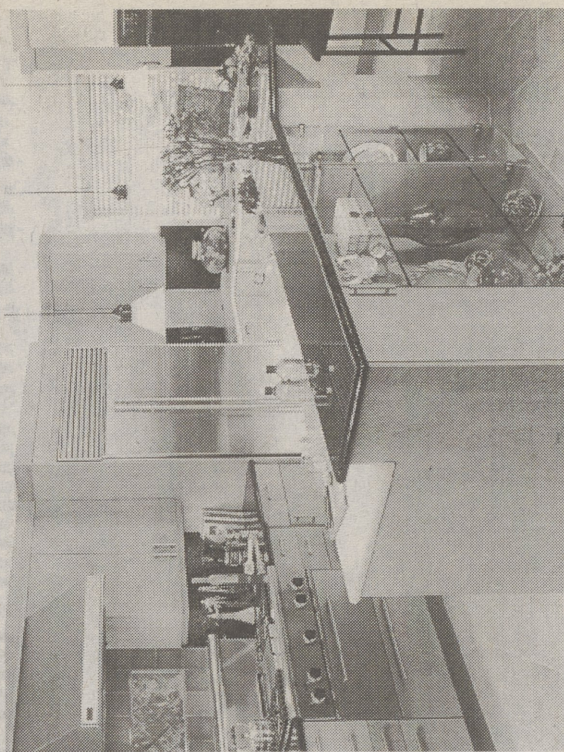
Personalizing your kitchen or bathroom can be done many ways. Let's face it — you spend large quantities of time in both rooms, so you should enjoy them to the fullest. The most important thing to remember is that the rooms should reflect you. Maybe it's your favorite color, a collection of items you already own or even a particular flower that catches your eye.

One easy way to personalize your room is to use faux painting, which creates texture or visual interest. The technique can be done in several ways, such as color washing, sponging and ragging, and all easy enough to do yourself. If you don't feel comfortable doing it yourself, you can hire an artist. You can paint a window with a view of snow-capped mountains and blossoming trees, or a view of the ocean with its sandy beaches and towering lighthouse peeking through an archway. Create a large bouquet of flowers or fruits on the ceiling above the island area.

The possibilities of using this technique are endless — let your imagination run wild! Another easy idea is stenciling a border. Don't limit yourself to stenciling on a wall. This technique also works well on floors. You can create your own design or buy a pre-cut template. You're bound to find something that fits your room's style, whether it's country, traditional or even contemporary. Remember... if you stencil the floors, be sure to protect your masterpiece by applying two or three coats of polyurethane.

Adding a backsplash design or a dramatic color scheme is another idea. There are thousands of tile murals already available, or if you're looking for a unique, one-of-a-kind scene, you may want to have one custom designed. Tile designs are plentiful, ranging from realistic tiles to imaginative, unpredictable ones, including animals, fruits and vegetables, plants, flowers and many more. This is the area of the room that can be seen from all angles, so spice it up with your own tastes.

Another overlooked area to personalize is the range hood. By painting it a striking color or adding a picture to it, you can add flair and style to your kitchen. Collections are the one thing that truly enable you to display your personality throughout an entire room. Collections of any shape, size and content can make a wonderful attraction to your kitchen or bathroom. Items such as seashells, rolling pins, lighthouses, cookbooks, or even pictures drawn by your own children or grandchildren will surely add personality to



Glass-front shelves add interest to this island.

old-fashioned western theme to a high-tech gallery. Cabinet pulls can be made out of materials such as metals, wood, plastic, porcelain or even stone. Several companies have made it their business to hand paint and design unique cabinet pulls to be used in either your kitchen or bathroom. Even if you don't find the design, color or pattern you are looking for, often times they will create it specifically for you.

Antiques can also play a pivotal role in the appearance of your kitchen or bath. By strategically placing a few antiques around the room you can transform an otherwise basic kitchen or bathroom into a warm and inviting room that is rich with culture and style.

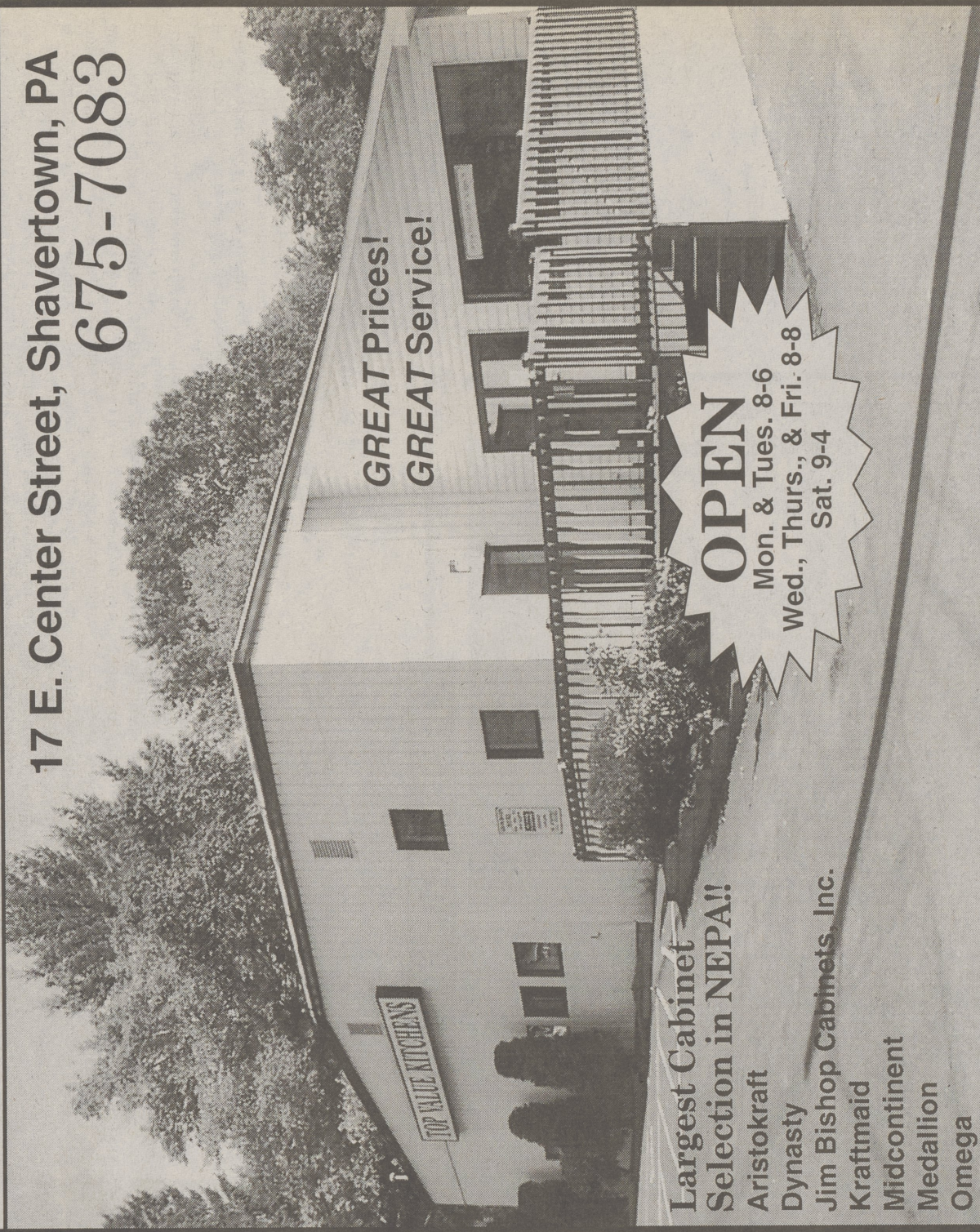
Designing around the collection can add charm and character. For instance, if you collect coffee mugs you may want to design your backsplash with colorful coffee mug tiles. Or choose a stencil or border with a coffee design.

In the bathroom, add a small decorative shelf to display your collection of colorful fish, and enhance your collection with a shower curtain and a border in a similar design.

Using decorative hardware such as distinctive door and cabinet hinges, doorknobs and cabinet pulls, can drastically alter the overall look of your kitchen and add that personal appeal. It can turn ordinary oak cabinets into anything from an

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