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Perk up your garden

Used coffee grounds make an excellent compost

BY **DEBBIE ARRINGTON**



Charlotte Owendyk uses coffee grounds throughout her Roseville garden. Her poodle Kelly leaves them alone.

PHOTO BY DEBBIE ARRINGTON

Want a greener garden with more flowers and less work? Give your soil some grounds.

Used coffee grounds make excellent compost. They're fast and easy. And unlike most kitchen waste, they're ready to go straight from the counter to the garden.

Make friends with your favorite barista, advise local gardeners. Your plants will thank you.

"I pick up my coffee grounds from Starbucks," said Charlotte Owendyk, who has a spectacular garden in Roseville. "They have five-pound bags of used grounds, packed in tight. I dig them in where I drop them in the garden."

Owendyk sprinkles the used grounds about 1/4-inch deep around her many shrubs and roses, then gently works them into the topsoil. Her poodle Kelly leaves them alone.

"Coffee grounds are neutral pH; they're not acidic," she explained. "They're organic with lots of nitrogen and break down right away. By putting them on the soil, you're feeding the soil web, all the fungi and bacteria that make your soil healthy and help your plants. The more organics you feed your soil, the less fertilizer you need."

Owendyk also adds her household coffee grounds to her compost bin. From home-brewed coffee, the paper strainer can be composted, too.

"Compost is the best thing you can do for your garden," she said.

Jeanie Campbell of Fair Oaks has a big garden, so she gets big bags of grounds from her neighborhood Starbucks.

"I ask for the 20-pound bag," she said. "Otherwise, they'd just be taking the grounds out to the dumpster. And there's no charge."

Keeping coffee grounds out of landfill to feed the soil has rewards, she noted. "It's good for the Earth," Campbell said. "And it smells good, too."

Coffee shops, bars and houses generate masses of used grounds every day. Instead of going in the trash, that food waste is available free to customers—if they come prepared.

"Absolutely, but bring a bucket or Tupperware so we can easily dump them in," said Elise Neal, manager of The Naked Lounge Midtown, a popular coffee spot on Q Street.

The lounge goes through about 11 pounds of ground coffee and espresso every day, Neal said. Gardeners from nearby Fremont Community Garden drop by for grounds to go with their lattes.

"At our roasting facility, ReSoil Sacramento comes by all the time," Neal added. "They ride by on their bike with a big bucket and fill it up."

Part of Green Restaurants Alliance Sacramento, ReSoil Sacramento is a pedal-powered community compost network that helps close the loop in the farm-to-fork-to-farm capital. The service picks up hundreds of pounds of restaurant kitchen waste every day, including a lot of coffee grounds. The waste is turned into compost at more than two dozen urban farms and community, church and school gardens.

The Naked Lounge keeps some of its coffee grounds for its own plants.

"At another of our locations, the manager works coffee grounds into the potted plants," Neal said. "The plants love it." □

Debbie Arrington, an award-winning garden writer and lifelong gardener, is co-creator of the Sacramento Digs Gardening blog and website.