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Free fertilizer

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On our beach walk today I noticed that we once again have seaweed - for some reason it disappears during the dry season - I must remember that and stock up next time! It started raining but I couldn't stop myself and was running around dragging bunches of seaweed back to the car. I like to think I looked like a mermaid emerging from the deep bringing armloads of pure gold, but that would actually take a bit of imagination. I certainly felt as though I had struck gold!

The asparagus is now mulched with seaweed and some new shoots are appearing. Yummy - time to start harvesting them now!

The other thing I have been wanting to do for a long time is make comfrey juice. I do already use the leaves as mulch and add them to the compost. Glen, who gardens in a community plot in England has posted some very interesting reports on comfrey. Loosely following his instructions I have a pot of comfrey leaves which is going to drip down into the lower bucket.

Evidently one of the problems can be flies laying eggs and turning it into a maggoty mess so I used some leftover veil fabric from my daughters wedding to fly proof the container. (I knew that would come in useful sometime!) The main thing is that this need to rot aerobically and this will allow a free flow of air. I have heard different reports of how bad this smells, but I am sure that if it is bad my hubby will ask me "what is in that bucket, are you a making that horrible weed tea again? "

Just thinking about it, I do use quite a few "strange" techniques in fertilizing my garden organically. I have built up quite nice rich soil in the 2 years I have been building this garden, so I am sure some of them work! I would say that my motto would be lots of different additives in small quantities added often.

Some of the "free" things I do:

1. Compost - hot - I have a bin and all kitchen scraps go into the bin, I keep adding to it, but do mix it up once or twice a week. I probably don't get all the way down to the bottom every time, but I can feel a lot of heat in it. I don't add manure - just don't like the idea! I don't intentionally add weeds that have seeds. I do add comfrey leaves, pigeon pea leaves and lemongrass which are supposedly accelerators. I would say that my compost consists of 20% household peelings, eggshells etc. 40% cuttings and green leaves. 40% shredded dry leaves and cardboard. I mostly keep an eye on it and if it seems a bit wet, I will just add some shredded newspaper or cardboard. I keep extra cardboard on my paths so it is nice and soggy and doesn't mat up when I add it. (It is the wet season) If it seems dry then I cut some green leaves and add them, and stir it up - mostly all it needs to get activated again is a good stir. Every couple of weeks I will drag a couple of bucketfuls of compost out of the bottom of the bin. If it is not quite broken down enough I might turn it back into the top again. In the tropics material breaks down so quickly that you don't really want to wait too long before using the compost. I read this information about a year ago and I feel that helped my garden immensely. So I am continually adding compost as mulch. I do get quite a few weeds, but they are easy to

pull up - mostly passion fruit, pawpaw and tomato. Sometimes I let them grow where they are too.

2. Compost cold: I also have a old wheelie bin in which I have added layers of garden waste - green and brown layers, this does not get mixed, or added to, and hopefully will eventually create compost all by itself. I started that to see if it does better added all in one go without adding and taking away from the bin.

3. Leaf mould: In another wheelie bin I have extra leaves since at times the lychee tree sheds more leaves than my little compost bin can handle. Initially I filled the bin, wet it down and left it, and it has now reduced in volume by a half. I didn't want to mix new with old, so the next lot of leaves that I collected I placed in garbage bags, added a little water and placed just on top of the older leaves. Those can be lifted out to access the older leaves in the bottom. This process supposedly takes a couple of years.

4. Fish and shellfish: Whenever I have a fish carcass or prawn heads and shells I bury them in the garden. I also first discovered this from Kitchen gardeners International. I don't have a dog, but I cant say that it even attracts rodents - I normally just bury the whole packet wrapped in butcher paper about a foot or two deep.

5. Seaweed: I gather seaweed quite often and add to the compost, and also use as mulch on the asparagus. I think it is too salty for most other crops, although I did use quite a sizable layer of it when building up my original vegetable garden lasagna style.

6. Weed tea: When weeding I will place all the weeds in a bucket with a little water added and cover to let rot. This does smell pretty bad, but diluted with water I use as a foliar feed and feel I am not "wasting" the nutrients that the weeds have stolen from my garden. I cover the bucket so that I don't get flies and midges, but am not sure that is the right way - it might be better to incorporate some air, so this application needs a little more research.

7. Crusher dust: I occasionally add a little crusher dust to the ground as I feel this adds minerals and also keeps the sandy soil from getting compacted in heavy rain.

All in all I think that my gardening hobby is not an expensive persuit since I get so much fertlizer for free and save seeds, and propogate by cuttings. A winning deal all around!

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