



Black Gold

By Dianne Reitan

For the last six years, my husband Dave and I have been renting the same 20x40 plot at our neighborhood community garden. Every year when the garden is shut down in mid October, Class 1 Certified Compost is delivered and spread over plots so the decaying organic matter can settle into the ground during the winter. Many of the community gardeners, us included, also use barley straw during the season to suppress weeds, retain water and add organic material to the soil. Thus, the fall compost sits on top of the straw, helping to further break the straw down before the new season starts in late spring. The [community garden](#) is where I learned how to grow dahlias in 2021. I believe the reason I was so successful growing dahlias, despite not knowing anything about growing dahlias, was because of the compost and barley straw that had been brought in for decades to amend our plot.



Dianne standing in the Bear Creek Community Garden holding a bucket full of Otto's Thrill Dahlia.

Compost (what Martha Stewart refers to as [Black Gold](#)) helps a vegetable and dahlia garden by improving soil structure, boosting natural drainage, and providing slow-release nutrients. It acts like a sponge, holding water during dry spells and allowing excess water to drain away. This keeps dahlia roots healthy and stops the tubers from rotting. A beneficial soil-like substance, compost helps in so many ways:

- **Better Dirt:** Compost makes heavy soil (like clay) looser and light soil (like sand) thicker. This allows roots to grow deep and strong.
- **Healthy Food:** It adds a steady, natural supply of food to the soil. This helps plants grow big blooms without adding too much nitrogen.
- **Happy Bugs:** Compost attracts earthworms and helpful microbes. These little helpers break down old leaves and feed your plants naturally.



“Decomposition of organic matter is an essential biological process that’s ongoing in every nook and cranny of the planet. Composting is a method for you to copy nature’s process, speeding it up if you so choose, to ultimately reap a rich mound of soil-enhancing compost for your landscape.” *Composting for Dummies* by Cathy Cromell, Arizona Master Composter and Master Gardener

Because I could see the benefits of using compost on our community garden plot, I decided I wanted to have compost available to use for my backyard flowers and bushes. So several years ago, we bought and

assembled two round plastic dual chamber compost tumblers that reside at the back of our house. Since then, we've only been successful generating a few buckets of crumbling compost. Dave was able to use our homemade compost on a small patch of lawn in our front yard that was struggling on the north side. He noticed a big difference in new grass growth in just a few weeks.



But I must admit, I need to do a better job of paying attention to my backyard compost bins—I would get better results if I did! I decided I needed to learn more about the compost process and set my intention of incorporating a compost system into my daily routine. If I want more compost sooner, it obviously isn't enough to just throw my food scraps and fall leaves into the tumblers and only water and turn the bins every once in awhile. So I reached out to Adrian Hixon, a Colorado Master Gardener who invited us to her backyard to see her compost set-up. Her two-bin system allows her to cook-up one batch while she is collecting food and yard waste for the next round. This video shows you [the process](#).



Adrian Hixon's Backyard Compost Set-Up



While compost is comprised of materials in various stages of decomposition, humus is well-decomposed plant and animal matter. As microorganisms break down the organic matter, they release heat as a byproduct of their activity. If you build a pile with the right mix of ingredients, moisture and air, it quickly reaches 120 degrees and higher that can kill weed seeds and pathogens. Hot composting can take 3 weeks to 3 months depending on the mixing and remoistening. In contrast, cold or slow composting can take almost up to a year to obtain useable compost. What's the right mixture? 30 parts carbon to 1 part nitrogen by weight, which translates by volume to about 2 parts browns to 1 part greens. This balance fuels the microorganisms that break down your waste quickly, creating rich soil without foul odors.

Mix in brown and green compost ingredients

Organic matter high in carbon — what composters commonly call *browns* — provides energy for decomposer organisms as they consume and break down the contents of your compost pile. Organic matter high in nitrogen — called *greens* — supplies the decomposers with protein. Maintain well-fed composting organisms with these varied ingredients.

Browns	Greens
Dry leaves	Kitchen scraps
Woody plant trimmings	Coffee grounds and filters
Straw	Leafy plant trimmings
Pine needles	Grass clippings
Sawdust	Manure
Paper products	Feathers, fur, and hair

What are the rewards of composting at home? You may reduce or eliminate the need to buy soil amendments, conditioners and fertilizers. You could also save on your water bill because compost improves your soil's moisture-holding capacity. Compost keeps food and yard waste out of the landfills and that's better for the environment. Your garden will thank you for the beneficial microbes and essential plant nutrients and trace elements to improve soil fertility. Some things to keep in mind: Don't put oil, grease, bones, fish, meat or dairy in your compost bin; this will help to mitigate the midnight prowlers. Avoid feces that may contain parasites as well as barbecue or coal ashes as they contain sulfur oxides that you do not want to transfer to your garden. Be mindful that wood ashes are alkaline and that wood or sawdust products could be from chemically treated wood.



If the homemade process is just too much work for you personally, consider bringing in compost from a reputable seller. **Certified Compost** means the finished soil mixture you buy at a store is high-quality. Programs like the [US Composting Council STA Certified Compost](#) test batches to ensure they are safe for your garden and plants. Joe Lamp'1 from PBS's Growing a Greener World explains why he values the program [in this video](#). My community garden gets their compost from a local company, Rocky Top Resources, and their composts and humus is also approved by the Colorado State Extension office. Ask your local extension office for their resources and recommendations for local compost suppliers.

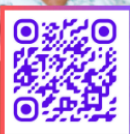
2026

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Securing the Future: The ADS National Show Endowment Campaign

The heartbeat of our ADS community lies in the excellence of our national exhibitions. To ensure these showcases remain a permanent fixture of our heritage, we are thrilled to announce a significant push for the ADS National Show Endowment Fund. This fund is designed to provide a permanent, sustainable financial bedrock for our national shows, protecting them from economic fluctuations and ensuring that future generations can experience the same caliber of artistry and competition we enjoy today.

The Goal: A Legacy in the Making

We have set an ambitious but vital goal to raise \$150,000 for the endowment. This will allow the annual interest earned from the endowment to be granted to societies with the commitment and capacity to host future national dahlia shows. Thanks to the incredible generosity of our community members, we have already raised \$45,000 toward this total! Now, we are looking to bridge the gap through a special commemorative campaign.

Honoring Eleanor and Wayne Shantz

In a cornerstone moment for this fund, a naming gift pledge has been established to honor the lifelong dedication of Eleanor and Wayne Shantz. Their impact on our organization has been profound, and this endowment will serve as a lasting tribute to their legacy. To reach our goal, we are launching a tiered matching campaign to inspire individual and society-level giving:

- The Shantz First Match: Every dollar donated by individuals or societies will be matched 1:1, up to the first \$25,000. **This effectively doubles your impact the moment you give.**
- The Board Challenge: If—and only if—we successfully meet that first \$25,000 goal, the Board of Directors will consider a second match of an additional \$25,000. If both matches are triggered and met, we will be well on our way to our \$150,000 target!

How You Can Participate

This campaign is timed to align with your mid or year-end charitable giving goals. We are seeking support from:

- Individual Members: No gift is too small when every dollar is doubled.
- Affiliated Societies: Help us honor the Shantzes by contributing as a collective group.

The campaign will run through **December 31, 2026. However, please consider giving by August 15th** as we would like to verbally recognize endowment donors at the 59th ADS National Show & Exhibition in Michigan at the awards banquet on Saturday, August 29. By contributing now, you aren't just giving a gift; you are ensuring that the ADS National Show remains a vibrant, well-funded reality for decades to come. Let's honor Eleanor and Wayne by making this vision a reality. Double your impact today. Visit our donation page to contribute to the ADS National Show Endowment Fund. Thank you!

dahlia.org/about/donate/ads-national-show-fundraising-effort



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*Dianne Reitan
Martin Kral*



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