

Whole Cycle Tuesday

Takeaway

Nature doesn't recognize the concept of waste, it focuses on resources in transition. Every fallen leaf and every decomposing branch becomes the foundation for future growth. By returning organic materials to the soil through composting and other beneficial uses, we work with nature's cycle instead of against it, creating healthier soils, stronger ecosystems, and more resilient communities.

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*"Nature does not hurry,
yet everything is
accomplished."*

— Lao Tzu

Nature Doesn't Create Waste

Walk through a mature forest and you'll notice fallen leaves, broken branches, and decaying logs covering the ground. While it may appear untidy, nature sees none of it as waste. Every piece of organic material is simply part of a continuous cycle that has sustained healthy ecosystems for millions of years.

When leaves and plant material fall to the forest floor, they become food for fungi, bacteria, insects, and other decomposers. These organisms break down complex compounds such as cellulose and lignin, releasing nutrients like nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium back into the soil. At the same time, a portion of the organic material is transformed into stable humus—the long-lasting fraction of organic matter that improves soil structure, increases water-holding capacity, and provides habitat for billions of beneficial microorganisms.

As nutrients are recycled, plant roots absorb them to fuel new growth. Fungi, particularly mycorrhizal fungi, extend the reach of plant roots, helping transport water and nutrients throughout the soil. The result is a self-sustaining system where nutrients continuously cycle from plants to soil organisms, and back to plants again. In nature, it's all about renewal.

Human systems have often interrupted this natural process. Yard waste, food scraps, agricultural residuals, and biosolids are frequently treated as materials to discard rather than valuable sources of carbon, nutrients, and organic matter. Every ton buried or wasted is a missed opportunity to rebuild the very soils that support our communities, landscapes and food systems.

Composting works because it mimics nature's own recycling process under controlled conditions. By providing the proper balance of carbon, nitrogen, oxygen, and moisture, naturally occurring microorganisms rapidly convert organic residuals into stable compost. The finished product returns organic matter, nutrients, and beneficial biology to the soil, improving infiltration, reducing erosion, supporting healthier plants, and increasing long-term soil resilience.

As soil organic matter declines in many parts of the world, rebuilding these natural cycles has never been more important. Returning organic materials to the land helps restore soil biology, improve productivity, and strengthen our ability to manage both drought and heavy rainfall. Rather than creating a new solution, composting simply accelerates one that nature has already perfected.

