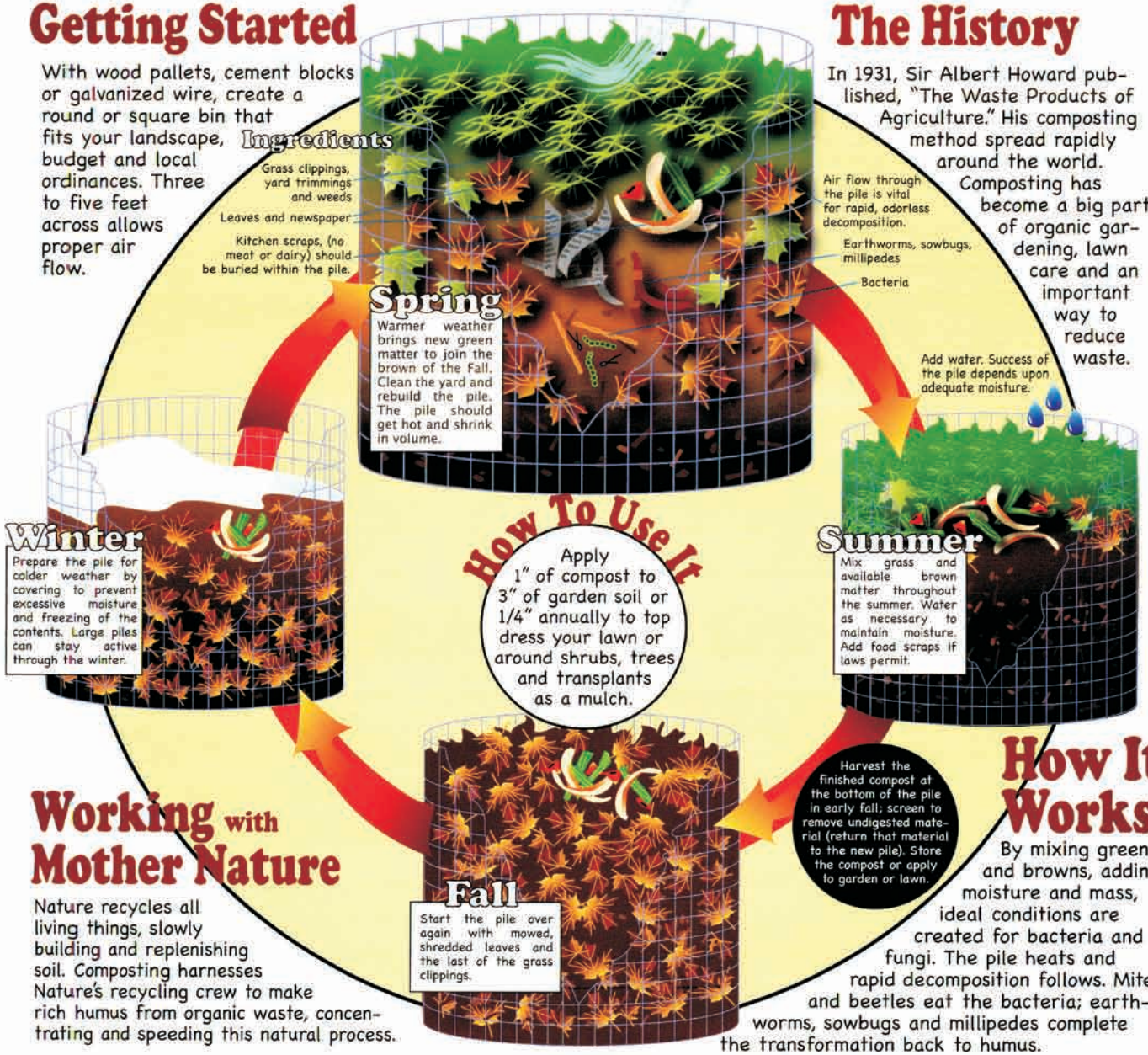
THE COM-POSTER

Getting Started

With wood pallets, cement blocks or galvanized wire, create a round or square bin that fits your landscape, budget and local ordinances. Three to five feet across allows proper air flow.

The History

In 1931, Sir Albert Howard published, "The Waste Products of Agriculture." His composting method spread rapidly around the world. Composting has become a big part of organic gardening, lawn care and an important way to reduce waste.



How To Use It

Apply 1" of compost to 3" of garden soil or 1/4" annually to top dress your lawn or around shrubs, trees and transplants as a mulch.

Working with Mother Nature

Nature recycles all living things, slowly building and replenishing soil. Composting harnesses Nature's recycling crew to make rich humus from organic waste, concentrating and speeding this natural process.

How It Works

By mixing greens and browns, adding moisture and mass, ideal conditions are created for bacteria and fungi. The pile heats and rapid decomposition follows. Mites and beetles eat the bacteria; earthworms, sowbugs and millipedes complete the transformation back to humus.

Compost Biology

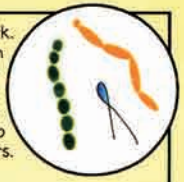
Bacteria work at different temperatures to break down the organic matter to produce humus, or compost.

Thermophiles take over as the pile gets hotter (113–170 degrees F.) They are the workhorses, breaking down protein, fats and complex carbohydrates and killing weed seeds. Fastest decomposition occurs between 130 and 150 degrees.

Mesophilic bacteria grow between 68 and 113 degrees. At these temperatures the pile takes a long time to decompose.

Psychrophilic bacteria live at temperatures from 14 to 59 degrees Fahrenheit. Decomposition slows at low temperatures. That's why we refrigerate food.

Bacteria do the major work. Warm wet conditions with a mixture of browns and greens set the stage for a bacteria banquet, as the populations explode to astronomical numbers.



First level predators feed on the single-cell bacteria. Some are also microscopic, others are just visible to the naked eye.

Larger predators are easily visible and much less numerous. They're at the top of the compost pile food chain.

Benefits of Composting

1. Adds vigor to your lawn and garden.
2. Retains moisture, resists drought.
3. Helps loosen heavy clay soils.
4. Increases living organisms in the soil.
5. Adds nutrients and conditions the soil.
6. Keeps methane-producing organic materials out of landfills.

Additional compost learning resources and activities are available on the web at www.StanSlaughter.com

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