

DIRTY FINGERNAILS AND ALL

‘Hugelkultur’? Say what?

BY SIOUX ROGERS



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Usually “when” I have a “brilliant” idea and “research” it, the “it” has already been done. Now the disclaimer for this article: I have never done this type of planting. This is clearly an experiment, for me.

This past summer, while decluttering our very, very overgrown, cluttered garden—and before I had read about Hugelkultur—I began a “mound garden” as a way to get rid of and also utilize the excessive amount of organic waste. The adventure began with low mounds, maybe three feet high and six feet long. No need to remember the numbers, although the depth needs to at least accommodate a deep root such as a long carrot. I made this elongated mound with old straw, some twigs, manure, and dirt. My mixture was not particularly evenly mixed. No matter!

So, turns out I was sorta, kinda “hugelkulturing.” Actually, hugelkultur is a German word meaning “mound gardening.” Brilliant. Apparently, it is the rage at this time (sustainableamerica.org/blog/what-is-hugelkultur). Reading all the methods, which are basically similar, I conclude it is like “lasagna gardening” with tree trunks and branches.

Building mounds via the “Hugelkultur” is clearly more time-consuming in the set-up process than a “regular” mound. Hugelkultur is not at all complicated, but rather straight-forward with dos and don’ts.

You can grow almost anything that you would grow in the ground or in a more traditional raised bed in a Hugelkultur mound. Remember, I have never done this before, but I’m excited to know I will. The only Hugelkultur planting I have actually seen was by a former German friend. She clearly was very familiar with this method as her garden is extremely productive with supersized vegetables.



Start by digging a trench to capture as much rain water and ground water as possible. Photo: twooaksfarmtalk.com.

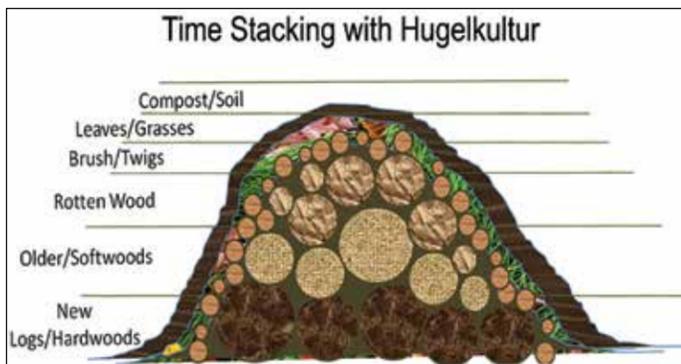


A finished, growing Hugelkultur bed. Photo: Lewis County Master Recycler-Composter group.

You can use one of the following plans to get started:

- Dig a two- to four-foot trench next to where you wish to plant. Lasagna layer the trench into a mound. Plant next to trench. The mound will be the fertilizer distributor.
- Dig a two- to four-foot trench, lasagna layer it until it’s full, and plant on top. This will look like your regular garden bed, but we know it is not. This particular style retains moisture the best. Imagine this as an underground mound.
- Dig a two- to four-foot trench, lasagna layer it, then keep going until it makes a mound, which is also part of the Hugelkultur, so keep piling up the wood. Either wait for the mound to settle or just make sure there is enough soil at the top and just plant directly.

A Hugelkultur bed is an excellent option for anyone dealing with difficult growing conditions such as poor drainage, compacted soil, or limited moisture, etc. Graphic: spruceacreshomestead.com.



The ingredients in the layers are the same as in your regular compost: kitchen waste, old leaves, grass clippings, manure; gosh, just add whatever. Be creative.

Now that you are finally building your mound, make sure it is a mound, not a pyramid shape as the soil might fall from the pointed top. So keep it as a mound. Use a mix of fresh and rotten wood. If you have a large forested area near you and several species to choose from, that’s awesome.

Don’t use too much wood from rot-resistant trees like cedar.

Don’t use fresh wood from willows or other trees that will sprout from fresh cuts.

The Hugelkultur garden is somewhat particular for wood to use or not. I will make it easy for you. Here is the list:

- Okay to use: maple, oak, birch, alder, beech, poplar, willow, cottonwood, apple, pear.

is composting in place, there’s no need to wheelbarrow compost from one place to another. The rotting organic material will slightly warm the soil, increasing the length of your growing season and helping plants that are on the slightly more delicate side. Good news.

The ruling principle for garden health is to feed the soil. When you feed soil, the soil then feeds the plants. Healthy soil means healthy plants.

This was kind of skimpy instructions for Hugelkulturing, but do you get the idea? Think organic mounds sustained with tree branches and trunks, far less watering, more plants in a smaller area and an ongoing flow of nutrients from mound to plants. For more, watch this two-minute video: bitly.co/Dp9M.

What’s small, red, and whispers? A hoarse radish.

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thanks you!
We so appreciate the Applegate community for the support we received while meeting as a church between Ruch and Jacksonville. We love the Applegate and its wonderful people and enjoyed serving the community the last two years. We recently moved our meeting location to the Oak Grove School. Drop by and say hi!
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