



HUGELKULTUR: BUILDING FERTILE SOIL WITH WOOD LOGS

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Forests have existed for thousands of years without landscaping companies installing irrigation systems or chemical companies fertilizing the soil. Trees grow as tall as buildings, trunks expand to almost the size of a trailer and branches extend as far as the eye can see. How do they do it?

Hugelkultur, an ancient form of sheet composting, has been practiced in Eastern Europe for centuries. Its German translation, "Hill Culture," mimics the composting cycle forests go through every year. It starts with the following steps:

- Clear the sod from the desired area or place thick overlapping cardboard.
- Assemble the biggest wood logs you have available. Most types of wood work, whether fresh or rotting.
- However, stay away from cedar or black walnut as they contain naturally occurring herbicides or toxins.
- Cover with wood sticks and tree trimmings, water the pile generously.

- Add 2 to 3 inches of organic matter, such as grass clippings, leaves, vegetable scraps or manure.
- Then add 2 to 3 inches of compost and water the pile
- Finally, cover it with leaves or wood chips to keep the pile moist and weeds from camping on your Hugelkultur mound.



Left, mound - logs in the bottom, followed by wood chips and twigs.

Right, final look, after the mound is covered with wood chips

Sit back, and let nature do the work for you. As time goes by, the wood logs and branches decompose much like the natural composting process in the forest. As they rot, they become like a sponge extracting moisture and slowly releasing it into the soil, eliminating the need for irrigation. Simultaneously, the rotting wood becomes the source of organic matter that all living plants need to grow.

The bigger the mound the longer it would take to decompose. A mound that is 5 feet high would take about 5 to 7 years to decompose completely. If you do not have access to wood logs, branches and sticks will do. However, the rate of decomposition will go faster. You can replenish the mound after each planting season by adding a layer of twigs or branches.

Hugelkultur is like aging wine, it gets better with time. You will also discover you do not need to dispose of yard waste because you will be using them!

Additional Resources:



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RESOURCES
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- <http://www.holzeragroecology.com>
- <http://www.richsoil.com>
- <http://www.allthingsplants.com>

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