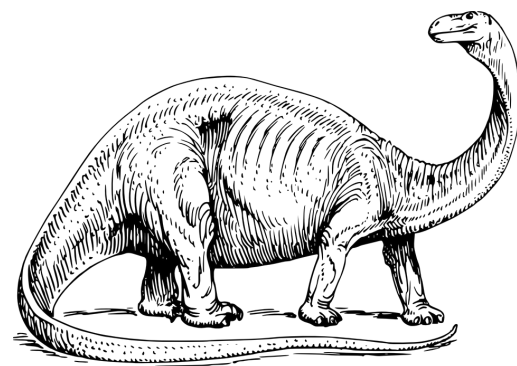


Kathy's Garden: COMPOSTING DINOSAURS



Why are there dinosaurs in my compost? I can figure out why there are forks & knives in it, given that the lidless bucket near my sink eats knives and forks along with food scraps. But dinosaurs? And here is a small knight in shining yellow plastic armor, and – oh, so that's what happened to my purple pen.

I love my compost pile. Yes, I love my struggling roses & my lilies; I love each new seedling and each old friend. I love my own true love and, alas, have loved false ones as well. But it is the compost pile, inelegantly placed just as you enter the winding path past the thimble berries and camellia and come to my little cabin in Piercy, it is that pile of scraps and leaf mold, dirt & oddments, that really underlies my garden & makes everything possible.

Compost is true alchemy; magic happening right before our eyes. Where else does all that seemed spoiled, destroyed, rotten, left-over, turn miraculously into food & strength for seasons of beauty & goodness?

You can find many good books & articles on how to make a compost pile that works; there are perhaps as many different systems & techniques as you'd find in an old fashioned pillow book. My system is pretty free-form. I make a layer cake of dry material (dead leaves, straw, whatever) layered with wet material (fruit peels, leftovers, green weeds). Wood ash and dirt go between layers. Dirt goes on top & the whole thing works best if it

is 3 or 4 cubic feet large. Thereafter as I add new material I turn the compost, digging in vigorously with my spade every few days. In about 6 to 8 weeks most of the original material has broken down to a fine crumbly mass & I spread it on the roots of plants that relish it, starting a new batch on the base of the old.

This is when I find dinosaurs. It is remarkable what ends up in my compost. Neat professional gardeners set up screens & sift their compost. I used to think this was to ensure a uniformly finished compost—very attractive. Perhaps, however, it was to get out the dinosaurs, hair ribbons, pens and bits of plastic bread wrappers. I end up gathering these oddments as I spread the compost on new beds. Although, who know, maybe cucumbers would enjoy growing with little plastic dinosaurs at their roots.

Plastic may not break down in the compost, but just about any organic matter does. I have a friend who was astonished to hear I put citrus peel in my compost. He claims orange peels simply sit sulkily & don't do anything. I buy oranges by the case for my family, so we have lots of peels. Some I dry, to add to my potpourris, but I put peels of dozens of oranges into my compost. They break down with 6 weeks if the pile is kept moist and turned often. I suspect my friend's compost pile may be too dry.

Don't put meat scraps in your compost, or fat, or diseased plants. Beyond that just about

anything goes. If the pile seems too soggy & isn't heating up (you should be able to feel heat rising from the heart of your compost when you hold your hand a bit above the surface) you need more dry materials to balance the mysterious carbon-nitrogen ratio. If the pile is dry & not heating it needs more succulent wet material, like fresh grass clipping or juicy weeds.

Don't be daunted. This is magic that anyone can take part in. A well turned compost pile with dirt as the initial top layer, will not smell bad. It will smell like the deep forest, a very comforting smell. If your sense of neatness & propriety is distressed by a free form pile you can always buy or make a bin or cylinder to contain the pile. I think containers make it much too hard to turn the pile as often as I like, but do what works for your life.

My compost feeds the garden when done, but while in process it is full of worms & succulent scraps. Lately a pair of ravens comes to check it out in the early morning; one night I came upon an owl sitting on the shovel handle, looking for mice. Or maybe it was in search of small dinosaurs?

Kathy Epling

ASTROLOGICAL UPDATE:

October 19 New Moon at the 27th degree of Libra, usually a relatively calm event is anything but this year. We're presented with exciting and in some ways explosive new aspects of our reality that we must welcome and work with as much as possible as the cycle is impacted by the Lights' exact opposition to electrical, disruptive Uranus. Added to this Mars' tense and pressurized quincunx to Uranus generates even more incentive to adjust to the immediate requirements of the time. It's a highly dangerous pattern creating an energy field to navigate with great care, especially around electrical and mechanical equipment, fire, sharp objects and of course erratic and distracted or angry drivers.


The Phoenix rising from the flames is an apt image for this turning point as we face trauma and grief from the California fires, as well as the other disasters unfolding in our world. We are all impacted by the catastrophes as we're all connected. All souls who perished in these events continue on their journey as another manifestation in Creation. Those left to rebuild lives are blessed with this moment of open opportunity, the realization that our lives are indeed miracles unfolding; we can see only a small fraction of the magnificence available to us. Mars-Saturn-Chiron have been engaged in a

challenging T-Square over the past week or so pressing for surrender to a higher perspective and serious consideration of how we proceed from here. Creative potential is off the charts even as the energy field is highly unstable.

All the aspects have considerable impact on our ability to release old patterns in relationships, group dynamics and participation in social change as we begin this new cycle in these areas for the year ahead. "Unity beyond polarity" is part of the commentary for Sun-Moon's degree in the Sabian Symbols from Rudyhar. Moon enters Scorpio 6:41 pm extending the journey into Shadow territory, helping us go through Libra's darker areas; indecision, empty flattery, need to please everyone at the expense of our values, superficial social involvements. In the global picture we have so much support for re-discovering diplomacy and cooperation in respectful and fruitful negotiations, and this in spite of world leaders.

-Salina Rains





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