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http://www.westseattleherald.com/sites/robinsonpapers.com/files/imagecache/popup_image/images/www.westseattleherald.com/2009/03/Questions+Answered.jpg

Janit Calvo

Finding answers to the new composting rules from the Elisabeth Miller Library. Miniature compost bin is 2.5 inches high.

A Garden For All: Questions answered

By [Janit Calvo \(/user/361/contact\)](http://www.westseattleherald.com/user/361/contact)

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[Elisabeth Miller Library \(http://depts.washington.edu/hortlib/index.shtml\)](http://depts.washington.edu/hortlib/index.shtml)

[Janit's Web site \(http://www.TwoGreenThumbs.com\)](http://www.TwoGreenThumbs.com)

[Janit's online store \(http://www.shop.TwoGreenThumbs.com\)](http://www.shop.TwoGreenThumbs.com)

I was going to do a completely different topic for today, but something more impressive has taken its place. Have you ever had a garden, or plant question, that you can't find an answer to? Try the Elisabeth Miller Plant Answer Line at the University of Washington Botanical Gardens. I'll bet they'll find your answer.

I often visualize these librarians accessing information at lightning speeds, working with huge databases built along moving sidewalks, housed in a gigantic labyrinth, lit with florescent lights and lined with plants of all kinds. Computers are buzzing and whirring, with lights flashing and bleeping, signaling their next challenging question. Tall ladders that whisk the librarians up to the stacks upon stacks of books, that are there waiting, ready, for that very detailed answer, to that very obscure query that just came in off the hotline.

The "Just-ask-us-phone" that lights up green, every time there's a gardener in need of an answer. "Have no fear, Elisabeth Miller Library is here!"

Perhaps I've watched too much science fiction movies over the years.

It looks like a normal library.

I was searching for more information on the new compost rules that are coming into effect at the end of this month. I obviously was looking in the wrong places, because I couldn't find anything on how meat and dairy products were supposed to be good for composting.

It was kind of bothering me, as some unanswered questions often do, so I turned to the Mothership, the Elisabeth Miller Library, called up the Web site, filled in a form and got more than I could possibly ask for - and more than I could find on my own!

I received an email with eight different links and an excerpt – how do they find this stuff?

(A quick answer for those inquiring minds: Cedar Grove, the company that processes the compost, has a super-duper system of specialized covers, thermostats and regulators that monitor the process of heating up the compost to a high temperature, killing any pathogens or bacteria that may exist. The process takes months from start to finish, and produces clean, sterile compost that can be used in your garden and vegetable beds.)

So give the Elisabeth Miller Library a try the next time you have that nagging plant question. You can ask by phone, or online, and you can specify how you would like to be answered. And, the most intriguing part for the gardener who is addicted to information: they can access the Center for Urban Horticulture Library catalog, and the libraries at all the UW campuses too.

The library also hosts a number of events, garden tours, plant sales (my fave!), children and youth programs, and anyone can go and use the library too. Their website is a great reference and full of useful information – checkout the plant sales calendar for events throughout the city and the state this spring!

But there is no plant-lined labyrinth though – just so you know.



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