

Bill Siverly

Turning Compost

Mid-September I pull the cord on my Tomahawk,
A roaring 8-horse chipper nobody makes anymore.
Over a month its spinning flails reduce a mountain of brush
To a few wheelbarrows of chips, as hungry blue jays shout.

Late October I mow up magnolia, maple, and alder leaves,
Pile them over the chips, sprinkle a handful of nitrogen,
And just add water to ignite the slow invisible fire—
The whole pile steaming under November frost.

A sunny day in January I fork apart *nigredo*,
Compost gone cold in damp decay, and smell the sweet
Dark matter of mystery, root of all that grows.
I make a mound of chips and a mound of leaves,
And then I break for lunch, for an hour, for a day.

I rebuild the pile: layer of leaves, layer of chips,
A little nitrogen and water every three layers or so.
The re-ignited pile begins to steam and sink
Under flurries of February snow.

Middle of March I fork the first wheelbarrows
Of dense and juicy compost from the loaf.
I spread it over garden mounds for spuds, lettuce, onions, peas.
Robins whistle and bumblebees hum over humus reborn.