

Why Should I Compost?

Composting yard waste, leave and food scraps at home is easier and cheaper than paying to load, transport and dispose of them at the town leaf composting site. The results can be fast and gratifying depending on how actively you compost. Your household trash will have reduced odors (no food scraps). And the results of composting – a stable, organic soil has the added benefits of reducing the need for fertilizer and frequent watering.

Getting Started:

Composting Basics

Creating compost is somewhat akin to baking a cake. Households need four “ingredients” for composting: Greens, Browns, Water & Air. The microbes and fungi, which are everywhere in the environment, will perform biology of breaking down the organic materials. To begin you need:

- ✓ **Greens:** Grass clippings, food scraps and similar materials
- ✓ **Browns:** Dried leaves, wood chips, etc.
- ✓ **Water:** Water or rather the correct amount of water is critical for getting good compost activity underway. Too little water and the pile will dry out, and biological activity will stop. Too much water will result in odors.
- ✓ **Air:** Compost piles need to be “fluffy” – created in a way that allows air to flow through the pile. This reduces any odors arising from anaerobic bacteria that can thrive in compact compost piles.

Equipment: Straight Talk on

Compost Bins

Using a compost bin – purchased or homemade – will help keep your composting operation tidy and keep animals from digging up food scraps. You can either purchase a manufactured unit or construct a homemade one. Manufactured compost bins include an array of shapes, sizes and composting methods. Many can be viewed and purchased online. SCRRA sells the Soil Maker compost bin at cost. Homemade compost bins are inexpensive and easy to make. Wooden pallets can be tied or strapped together. Old scraps of 2x6 or 2x8 and 2x4 wood can be cut and stacked. Wire mesh or screening can be formed into a circle and fastened.

When Is It Ready?

You'll know when your compost is ready when it is dark and rich and crumbles in your hand. The original organic materials will be barely recognizable. Lumpy pieces are easily removed by sifting the compost through a garden sieve or milk crate. Return lumpy pieces to the new compost pile to decay further.

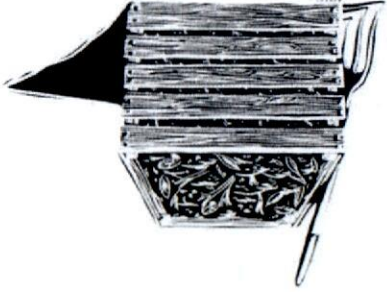


What is Composting?

Composting is a simple way to utilize organic processes to transform organic material such as yard waste and food scraps into a valuable humus or soil product. Composting combines carbon and nitrogen. Natural decomposition (microorganisms) breaks down the material, resulting in a dark, earthy soil.

What Can Be Composted?

Almost anything that was once alive can be composted. A balanced mix of carbon and nitrogen materials will speed the composting process and will result in a more fertile end product. Materials high in carbon (Browns) include: fallen leaves, hay, pine needles, sawdust, wood ashes, cardboard/paper (torn into small pieces), and wood chips. Woody materials should be shredded first to speed decomposition. Materials high in nitrogen (Greens) include: horse, cow, sheep and chicken manure, weeds (without seeds), grass clippings, plant refuse from the garden, and kitchen scraps (fruit and vegetable scraps, coffee grounds and filters, tea bags, egg shells, bread crusts, pasta). Materials which should not be composted include meat, bones, fatty foods, dairy products, grease, oil, charcoal ashes or pressure-treated wood.



Troubleshooting - Composting Problems:

SYMPTOMS	PROBLEM	SOLUTION
The compost has a bad odor	Not enough air or not enough carbon materials	Turn it and add carbon materials
The center of the pile is dry	Not enough water	Moisten materials while turning the pile
The compost is damp and warm in the middle, but nowhere else	Pile is too small	Collect more dry carbon material and mix the older ingredients into a new pile
The heap is damp and sweet-smelling but will not heat up	Lack of nitrogen	Mix in a nitrogen source like fresh grass clippings, fresh manure or blood meal.
Ants on compost	Food scraps exposed	Bury food scraps deeper

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What Goes Where?

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HOME COMPOSTING

A Guide to Small Scale Food & Yard Waste Composting



www.scrarra.org

860-381-5558

7 Hurlbutt RD, Suite #1
Gales Ferry, CT 06335