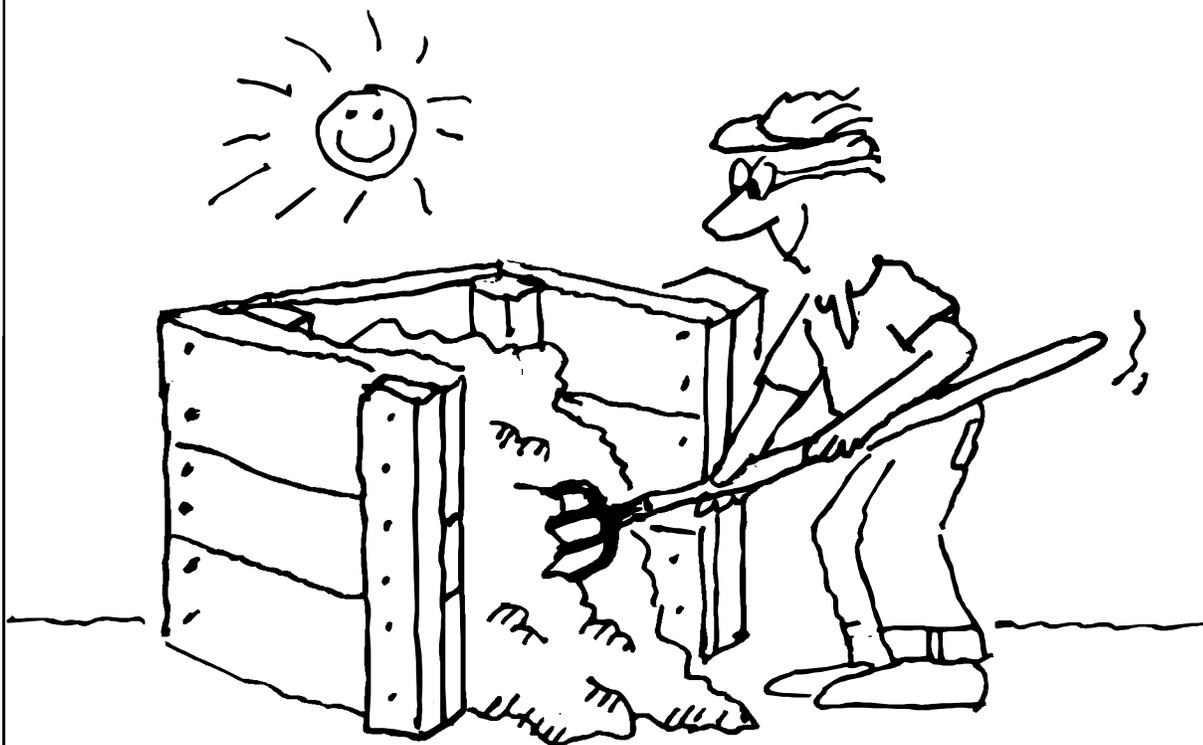


New York State Department Of Environmental Conservation

EVERYTHING YOU HAVE ALWAYS WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT HOME COMPOSTING

But were afraid to ask!

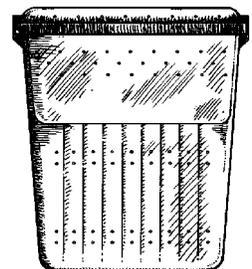


George E. Pataki, Governor
Erin M. Crotty, Commissioner

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What Is Compost?

Compost is a dark, crumbly, earthy-smelling mixture that consists mostly of decayed organic matter. Composting is a simple, natural process, nature's way of recycling nutrients and returning them to the soil to be used again. **By taking advantage of this natural recycling process, you can help lighten the load of waste that would otherwise go to a landfill.** Compost is used for

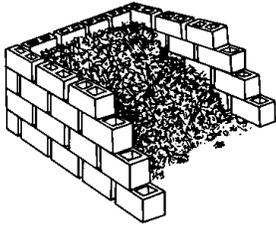


It is best to put 2 to 3 inches of straw or wood chips in the bottom to help it drain.

Turn the compost with a shovel or pitch fork. Keep the garbage can cover on, it helps keep out the critters. You may need to add water since it is covered.

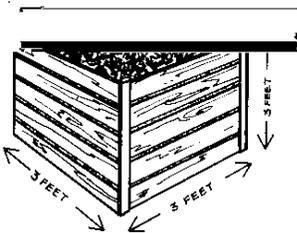
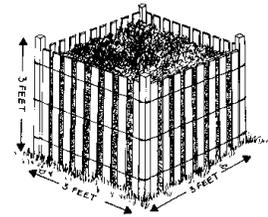
What You Need - A garbage can with cover, straw or wood chips and a drill for making the holes.

Compost Bins - Can be made out of many types of materials - blocks or bricks, snow fence, used pallets, wire mesh, etc.



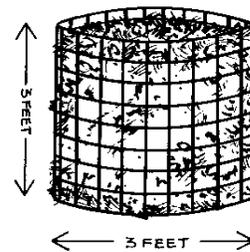
Blocks or Bricks - Just lay out the blocks or bricks without mortar. Leave spaces between the blocks or bricks to permit air to circulate. The best size is approximately 5 to 8 feet square and 3 to 4 feet high.

Snow Fence - Used snow fence is a simple way to build a bin. Just drive four corner posts into the ground and attach the snow fence.



Used Pallets - Find four clean pallets and fasten the corners together, and start filling. You may want to keep one corner loose, so the bin can be opened for turning and removing compost.

Small-Mesh Wire Fencing - Buy or find wire mesh, form into a circle or square and add your compost materials.



Bins do not have to be square, they can be rectangular or a circular structure, it's your choice. Remember, for a typical home garden, a bin 3-to-4 feet in height and 5-to-8 feet square will do.

Locate it away from buildings and combustible materials.



Store Bought Bins - There are a variety of commercial bins that can be bought at your local hardware or garden store.

How Do I Start My Compost Pile?

Begin by collecting your yard wastes and throwing them in your pile or bin. You can then add yard and food wastes anytime but it is best to bury the food waste in your pile (it helps keep out the critters). Chopping or mowing your wastes makes the process go faster. Just remember if you want a finished compost, you will need to start a new pile and let the first pile completely compost.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION:

Yard wastes make up approximately 15 - 20% of your waste stream or about 230 pounds per person per year.

Food wastes make up approximately 9% of the waste stream or about 100 pounds per person per year.

That's All There Is To It!

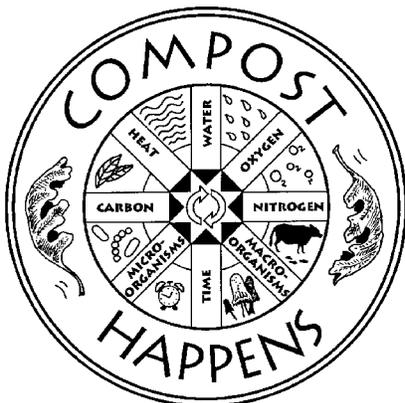
Kitchen scraps (minus meat, fish, bones and fatty foods) should be added to the center of the waste layers where heat will be the greatest. This also reduces unwanted critters coming to your compost pile.

Pile waste material loosely in the bin. Too much compaction inhibits the flow of air through the pile.

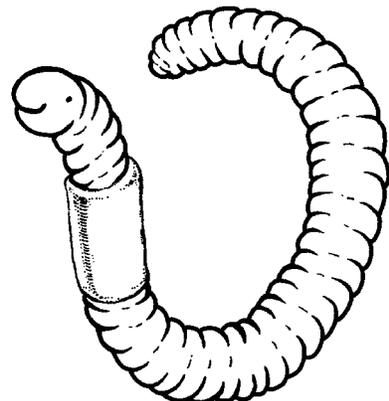
It helps to make the top layer slant toward the center where it will catch rainfall. **Water is the key to successful composting.** A compost pile should be kept damp - but not soggy - especially during dry spells.

Be patient! It will take six months to a year before the compost is ready for use.

How Does Composting Work?



Many organisms are involved in the composting process. They include bacteria, fungi, protozoans and centipedes, millipedes, beetles, ants and the most famous - earthworms!



Compostable materials contain carbon and nitrogen. We refer to them as greens and browns. Greens are fruit and vegetable wastes, coffee grounds, grass clippings, manure. Browns are leaves, straw, wood chips, sawdust.

The microorganisms use the carbon in leaves as an energy source. The nitrogen supplies the microbes with proteins to grow and multiply. The decomposing organisms need both carbon and



Uses for Compost

Gardens - improves moisture retention and soil texture. Use it around garden beds, trees or shrubs.

Lawns - It can also be sprinkled on your lawn. You will need to finely screen the compost first.



House Plants - use $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{2}{3}$ of your container volume instead of soil.



Composting Do's And Don'ts

DO add lime, small amounts of wood ashes or crushed eggshells to the compost pile to neutralize acids which may form and cause an odor problem.

DO mix grass clippings with other wastes to loosen them up. They have a tendency to compact.

DO keep the compost pile damp, especially during dry spells.

DON'T use unfinished compost. It will rob your plants of nitrogen instead of acting as a fertilizer.

DON'T compost weeds that are heavily laden with seeds. Some seeds will not be killed during the heating process.

DON'T add diseased vegetable plants to the pile if the compost will be used on a vegetable garden. The disease organisms may reappear the following year.

DON'T add meat, fish, bones or fatty food scraps to the compost mixture. They will attract animals (dogs, cats, rats, etc.) and they do not decompose readily.





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