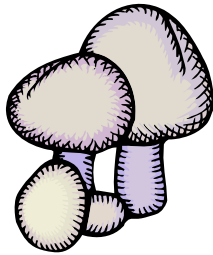


# Backyard Composting

## What is composting?

Composting is an accelerated version of the natural breakdown process that creates humus in the forest. Compost is a dark, crumbly mixture of organic materials such as leaves, grass, and vegetable scraps.



## Why compost?

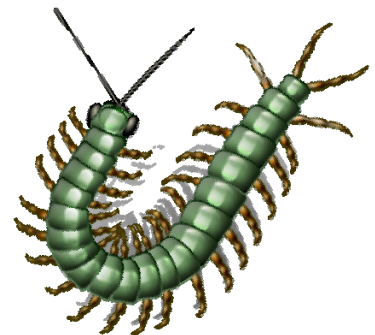
- ✓ Reduces the waste stream and saves landfill space
- ✓ Saves money on waste bags
- ✓ Saves your municipality money
- ✓ Allows you to create your own compost and soil additive
- ✓ It's relaxing
- ✓ You can't do it wrong because "compost happens"

## Compost Benefits

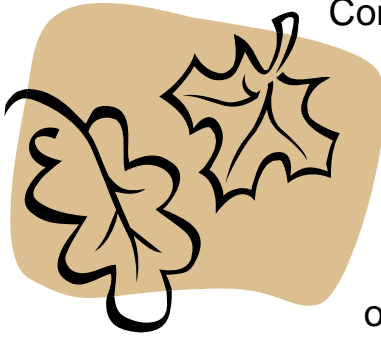
Because of its unique makeup, compost has many benefits.

Composting can:

- Suppress weeds,
- Retain moisture,
- Bind certain toxins,
- Improve soil quality,
- Reduce water runoff,
- Make the use of fertilizer more productive, and
- Stabilize pH, among many other things!



## What can compost be used for?



Compost can be used as mulch by spreading it around the bases of plants and trees.

Compost is also a great soil additive when worked into the top soil.

It can also be used as a potting soil mix. Up to 30% of the mix can be compost.

## What can and cannot be composted?

### Can

- ✓ Leaves
- ✓ Grass
- ✓ Plants
- ✓ Straw
- ✓ Shredded Paper
- ✓ Twigs & Brush
- ✓ Pine Needles
- ✓ Sawdust – Untreated

### Cannot

- ✓ Meat, Poultry, or Fish
- ✓ Diseased Plants
- ✓ Weeds with seeds
- ✓ Dairy Products
- ✓ Pet Feces
- ✓ Cooking Oil
- ✓ Invasive Weeds



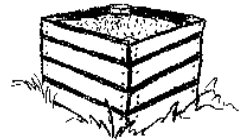
# How to Compost

Backyard composting is easy. There is no wrong way to compost and you can put as much or as little work into it as you want. Some people simply throw their materials into the compost pile and never do anything else with it.



If you're in a hurry for compost, the following process will provide you with useable compost in six to seven weeks. This technique provides the necessary food, in the form of nitrogen, water, and oxygen for the microbes to quickly decompose the materials.

1. Choose a partly shaded location that is convenient for you to use. Do not place the pile next to wooden buildings or tree trunks or they will decay as well.
2. Choose a bin to place your materials in, something between 3' x 3' x 3' and 5' x 5' x 5'. The use of a bin is optional, but it does help to keep your compost pile manageable.
3. Add your materials to the pile. Using a ration of three parts brown materials (high carbon, low nitrogen) to one part green materials (high nitrogen, low carbon) will provide the ideal nourishment for the microbes responsible for breaking down the material.



## Green Materials

Grass clippings  
Vegetable wastes  
Manure  
Coffee Grounds

## Brown Materials

Leaves  
Bark  
Twigs  
Wood Chips  
Newsprint

4. Place brown materials on the bottom with a layer of green material and soil or compost on top.

**Tip:** Shredding the materials by running over them with a lawnmower will help to speed up the composting process.

5. Repeat the layers until you run out.
6. To make sure the proper moisture level has been achieved squeeze some of the material. It should have the consistency of a wrung out sponge. If the pile is too dry, add some water. If it is too wet, add some dry material.
7. Mix the material thoroughly once per week.

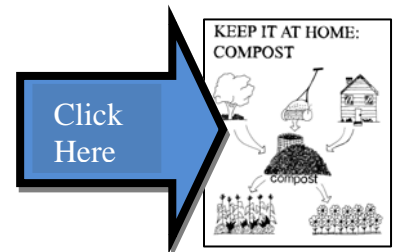
**Tip:** Mixing can also be done every four days, which will speed the composting process.

8. Use the finished compost.

## How do I know when my compost is ready?

The compost is ready to be used when it looks dark and crumbly and none of the ingredients are visible. It should also have a sweet, earthy smell.

**For more thorough information** on backyard composting, click here to download the free Lawrence County's Backyard Composting manual.



## Where to get a Compost Bin

There are a variety of compost bins available. Bins can be purchased through many gardening catalogs or stores.

The Lawrence County Recycling/Solis Waste Department has Biostack Compost bins available for \$20 each plus tax. The bins retail for \$130 in gardening catalogs. Supplies are limited. Contact the Lawrence County Recycling/Solid Waste Department to purchase a bin.