Livingston County Solid Waste Program

HOME COMPOSTING

Recycle Your Yard Waste the Natural Way

WHAT IS COMPOSTING?

Composting is the natural breakdown of organic materials. It is nature's way of recycling plant materials back into the soil. The result is a rich, crumbly, soil-like material that can be used in gardens, flowerbeds, or in potted plants.

THE COMPOSTING RECIPE:

"One part green and three parts brown,
Turns the compost into ground.
Add some water and some soil,
Turning is the only toil."

The ideal combination for composting is one part "green" or nitrogen-rich materials and three parts "brown" or carbon-rich materials.

GREEN	BROWN	DO NOT COMPOST
Grass Clippings and Weeds	Autumn Leaves	Meat Scraps or Bones
Livestock Manure	Wood Chips	Cooked Foods
Garden Prunings	Pine Needles and Pine Cones	Dairy Products
Raw Vegetable and Fruit Scraps	Dead Plants	Oils, Grease or Sauces
Coffee Grounds and Filters	Hay	Peanut Butter
Tea Bags	Sawdust	Bread
Crushed, Rinsed Eggshells	Shredded Paper (small amounts)	Pet Manure

STEP 1: Choose a bin or location for your compost pile. A bin can be purchased at most garden supply stores or can be easily constructed with some wood and chicken wire or with four wood pallets.

STEP 2: Place the brown and green materials in layers in the bin. Remember to use 3 times as much brown material as green material.

STEP 3: Add just enough water to dampen the materials. Too much water can cause odors. It may also cool the microorganisms that decompose the material and cause them to become inactive.

STEP 4: Periodically turn the materials using a shovel or a pitchfork. Composting will not occur without enough oxygen.

STEP 5: Depending on the pile type, composition, temperature, moisture content, and aeration, your pile could be ready to harvest anywhere between 6 weeks to a year.

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WHAT DO I DO WITH THE FINISHED COMPOST?

Finished compost will be loose and crumbly and will resemble dark soil. It is an excellent soil conditioner and fertilizer and should smell sweet, like the floor of a forest. When mixed with sandy soil, compost helps to retain and hold water. When mixed with clay soils, compost loosens the soil particles and allows for better drainage.

Compost can be used with equal parts potting soil or garden soil for container gardening. The compost adds nutrients and texture to encourage plant growth. Plant in a well-drained container, water frequently and add fertilizer to supplement nitrogen content, which is quickly lost in containers.

Compost can be used as mulch around garden plants, under bushes, and around trees. Spread 2 to 3 inches of compost to help hold in moisture, reduce weeds, and gradually feed organic matter into the soil and plant roots. Compost is especially useful in the hottest and driest periods of summer.

Compost may be added to gardens in the spring or fall. Apply the compost in layers of 1 to 2 inches or add the compost in trenches, furrows and seedling holes when planting or transplanting.

TROUBLE SHOOTING GUIDE

Problem Compost not breaking down

Cause
- Too many brown materials
- Pile too dry
- Pile too wet
- Pile too small

Solution
- Add more green materials
- Turn the pile to aerate
- Add water
- Build pile to 1 cubic yard

Problem Rotten or ammonia odor

Cause
- Too many green materials
- Too much moisture
- Food remains on top of pile

Solution
- Mix in brown materials
- Turn the pile to aerate
- Mix in wood ash to absorb odor
- Bury food remains in pile
- Cover pile from rain and snow

Problem Flies and pests

Cause
- Exposed food scraps

Solution
- Bury food waste
- Turn pile to increase temperature
- Do not add meat or fatty foods
- Cover pile

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