

Westchester's yard wastes can be recycled!

This brochure will give you basic composting ideas. A bin is not required to compost but it does make the area look neater. Bins can be constructed at home out of old wooden pallets, lumber, wire or concrete block or purchased at a garden center or hardware store.

What is compost?

Compost is a dark, crumbly and earthy-smelling form of decomposing organic matter that can be used to enhance everything you grow.

Why should I compost?

Composting is a practical and convenient way to handle yard waste. It is easier and cheaper than bagging yard waste and it improves your soil and plants. If you have a garden, lawn, trees, shrubs or planter boxes, you have a use for compost.

By using compost, you return organic matter to the soil in a usable form. Soil with compost added holds more nutrients and water, improves soil structure and drainage and enhances plant growth.

What can I compost?

Yard waste, such as fallen leaves, grass clippings, weeds and the remains of garden plants, makes excellent compost. Woody yard wastes can be clipped and sawed down to a size useful for wood stoves or fireplaces or run through a shredder for mulch-making.

Kitchen wastes, such as salad greens, vegetable and fruit peelings and coffee grinds, may be added by burying them several inches deep in your compost pile. Avoid meat scraps, bones, dressings, oils and fatty foods. Put these in your garbage.



Composting Methods

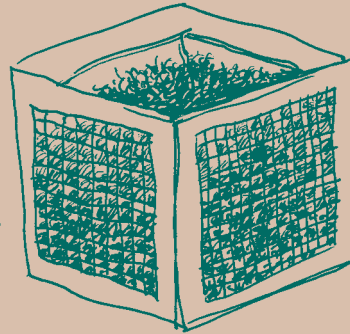
Holding Bins and Piles

Holding bins or piles of yard waste are the easiest and least time-consuming way to compost.

Which wastes? Non-woody yard waste is the most appropriate.

How? Place the holding bin where it is most convenient. Drop various yard wastes into the bin as they are collected. Chopping or shredding wastes, alternating high carbon and high nitrogen materials and providing sufficient moisture and aeration will speed the process (see "Composting Basics" section). Waste may also be piled in non-windy, unobtrusive areas.

How long does it take? It can take from six months to two years, so you need to be patient. However, this is the simplest of composting methods.



Turning Bins

This is a series of three or more bins that allows waste to be turned on a regular schedule. They are most appropriate for gardeners with a large volume of yard waste and the desire to make a high quality compost. Another type of turning bin, the barrel composter, tumbles the waste for aeration.

Which wastes? Non-woody yard waste is appropriate. Kitchen wastes without meat, bones or fatty foods can be added to the pile.

How? Alternate the layering of high-carbon and high-nitrogen materials to approximately a 30:1 ratio (see "Composting Basics" section). Keep materials as moist as a wrung-out sponge. Check the pile temperature regularly; when the heat decreases substantially, turn the pile into the next bin. Dampen the materials if they are not moist and add more high-nitrogen material if heating is not occurring. Then make a new pile in the original bin. Repeat the process each time the pile in the first bin cools. After two weeks in the third bin, the compost should be ready for garden use.

How long does it take? This method produces a high-quality compost in as little as six weeks, depending on the moisture, aeration and volume of the pile and the materials used. It requires a substantial amount of work.

Mulching

Mulch is a layer of yard waste placed on the soil surface to conserve moisture and restrict weed growth.

Which wastes? Woody yard wastes, leaves and grass clippings.

How? Spread leaves, grass clippings or wood chips beneath plantings. For woody materials up to 1" in diameter, rent or purchase a chipper/shredder. Tree services often will deliver wood chips free. These chips can also be used for garden paths.

How long does it take? All yard wastes will work first as a mulch and then, as decomposition proceeds, as a soil enrichment.



Composting Basics

BIOLOGY: Many organisms that cause decomposition live in compost piles. Numerous bacteria start the process and are soon joined by fungi, protozoans, centipedes, millipedes, beetles and earthworms.

MATERIALS: Compostable wastes contain carbon and nitrogen. The decomposing organisms need both carbon and nitrogen to work. The amount of carbon and nitrogen is called the "C:N Ratio." A mix of materials composed of 30 to 50 parts carbon to one part nitrogen works best. Below is the C:N Ratio for various materials:

Sawdust	500:1
Paper	170:1
Leaves	40:1 to 80:1
Rotted Manure	20:1
Non-woody Weeds	20:1
Grass Clippings	19:1
Kitchen Wastes	15:1

SURFACE AREA: The more surface area the decomposing organisms have to work on, the faster waste becomes compost. Chopping waste with a shovel, sickle, shredding machine or lawn mower will speed the composting process.

VOLUME: Heat is generated by the decomposing organisms as they work. Piles smaller than three feet cubed (27 cu. ft.) will have trouble holding this heat, while piles larger than five feet cubed (125 cu. ft.) don't allow enough air to reach the organisms at the center. These proportions are of importance only if your goal is to make compost quickly.

MOISTURE & AERATION: The decomposing organisms function best when the compost materials are about as moist as a wrung-out sponge and have many air passages. Extremes of sun or rain can adversely affect this moisture balance.

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For more information on
lawn care, grasscycling, gardening
and compost bin construction,
contact:

Cornell Cooperative Extension of Westchester County

26 Legion Drive
Valhalla, NY 10595
914-285-4640

For recycling information,
contact:

**Westchester County
Recycling Hotline**
914-813-5420 or
westchestergov.com

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Backyard Composting

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL FACILITIES
Anthony M. Landi, P.E., Commissioner