garbage to GARDENS
Compost Grows
**WHAT IS COMPOST?**

Composting is the natural process of breaking down organic material—anything that comes from a plant or animal—into nutrient-rich material called compost. This process is carried out by millions of decomposer organisms like worms, mites, fungi and microscopic organisms. Composting transforms organic waste from an unstable, rotting state to a stable, rich, earthy state.

**WHY COMPOST?**

- **It’s Earth Friendly**: Almost 25 percent of American household waste is composed of food scraps or yard waste. This means that 59 million tons of the materials in our landfills could have been composted instead. Composting saves landfill space, saves resources and returns valuable material to productive use.
- **It Enriches Soils**: Compost helps improve soil structure, increases the soil’s ability to hold water and air, enhances soil fertility and stimulates healthy root development.
- **It Helps Prevent Pollution**: When you compost, you produce methane, a greenhouse gas 21 times more powerful than carbon dioxide. Composting these materials means they don’t go to the landfill and are put to work in farms and gardens instead.
- **It’s Easy**: Composting can be as easy as you want to make it. For an easy compost pile, just layer green and brown wastes.

**COMPOSTING FAQS**

**Q:** Can I compost my pet waste?
**A:** Pet wastes from cats, dogs and other pets contain pathogens that can be transmitted to humans. Most home composting operations don’t reach the temperatures needed to destroy these pathogens. Manure from plant-eating animals, such as horses, rabbits, goats or other animals can be safely composted in a hot pile (see directions on this poster).

**Q:** What happens to my compost during the winter?
**A:** The composting process produces heat as a byproduct, which means that many compost piles will stay warm and keep working even if temperatures dip below freezing. In a cold Wisconsin winter, though, most home compost piles will eventually slow down or freeze. Don’t worry; composting will start again as spring sets in. To keep composting throughout the winter, you can use a covered pile bin. Tip: Make a hole in the compost pile before it freezes and keep a container of dry browns nearby. Put your food scraps in the hole and cover with a couple of inches of the browns.

**Q:** How long will it take to produce usable compost?
**A:** Depending on which method you choose, composting can take anywhere from 3–18 months. Chopping or turning the pile regularly (about once per week) will speed up the process.

**Q:** Will my compost stink?
**A:** Compost should smell like soil. Always bury food waste in the pile to prevent odor and keep away pests. If your compost is smelly, that’s a sign that it needs more air. Turn the pile regularly to promote breakdown and aerate the pile.

**Q:** How often should I turn my compost?
**A:** You can turn your compost as often or as little as you would like. Easy compost (see directions on this poster) can be turned once or not at all. Hot piles should be turned about once a week. In general, turning compost on a regular weekly schedule will help produce finished compost more quickly.

**Q:** How will I know when my compost is ready to be used?
**A:** Completed compost is dark brown, crumbly and has an earthy odor. You should not see any of the original materials in completed compost.

**Q:** What can I do with finished compost?
**A:** Compost can be added to lawns and gardens as a soil amendment to improve soil structure and health. Compost can also be used as mulch to reduce weeds, prevent erosion and maintain moisture.

**CHOOSE A COMPOSTING SYSTEM:**

You don’t need many materials to start composting. Choose a composting system—bin, pile, or wire or wood enclosure—and add your compostable materials. Choose which system is best for you. See below for materials to add and how to maintain your system.

**GREENS**

- Fruits and vegetables (unwashed or sourced)
- Breads and grains
- Coffee grounds and filters
- Grass clippings and young weeds
- Paper tea bags (staple removed)

**BROWNS**

- Cotton or wool rags
- Dry and vacuum lint
- Eggshells
- Husk畅husk
- Fireplace ashes
- Sawdust
- Hay and straw

**WHAT NOT TO ADD:**

- Metal, glass or plastic
- Meat, fish or bones
- Dairy products, grease, lard or oils
- Pet wastes, including cat litter
- Soiled diapers
- Black walnut tree leaves or twigs
- Yard trimmings treated with chemical pesticides
- Treated or painted wood

**WHAT IS VERMICOMPOSTING?**

Vermicomposting uses worms to process organic material. Because vermicomposting can be done inside, it’s a great option for those living in apartments, or school grounds.

To start your own vermicomposting process you need only a few simple materials:

1. Bin for worms
2. Biodegradable bedding (shredded paper or cardboard)
3. Worms
4. Food waste

**THE BIN**

Choose a bin for your worms that is less than 10” deep and has a large surface area. The bin can be metal, antqaited wood or plastic. Choose a bin size depending on how much food waste you have in your household or classroom. Drum ¼” wide drainage holes in the bottom of your container.

**THE BEDDING**

Bedding gives your worms a place to work and helps maintain optimum balance in the worm bin. Use light, fluffy, biodegradable materials free from pesticides or chemicals. Good choices for bedding are thinly shredded newspaper or computer paper or shredded cardboard. Plan on 5–8 pounds of bedding for a 2’x2’ bin. 9–13 pounds for a 2’x3’ box. Pour in three pints of water per pound of dry bedding and mix well.

**VERMICOMPOSTING**

Worms processes simple materials and waste, such as a large amount of food waste and yard waste. Worms can eat just about anything–vegetable and fruit peelings, paper and sawdust. Greens are nitrogen-rich, moist materials like grass clippings, fruits and vegetables.

**COMPOSTING IS AS EASY AS 1-2-3**

**CHOP MATERIALS**

If you want them to break down more quickly.

**MIX “browns” with “greens.”**

**KEEP COMPOST AS MOIST as a wrung-out sponge.** Water as needed to maintain moisture balance.

A basic compost pile needs only four ingredients: browns, greens, air and water. Browns are carbon-rich, dry materials like branches, leaves, paper and sawdust. Greens are nitrogen-rich, moist materials like grass clippings, fruits and vegetables.