



COMPOST WORKS FOR YOU

Not only does composting help the environment, it helps your garden, yard, and house plants too! When compost looks like soil and smells sweet and earthy, it is ready to use. Here are some of the most common ways to use compost:

IN THE GARDEN

Before planting, mix a 4-8 inch layer of compost into nutrient-depleted or poor soils. Mix a 1-3 inch layer of compost into annual garden beds at least once a year. Compost adds nutrients and beneficial microbes, holds water, and improves plant growth.

AROUND THE YARD

Spread a 1-6 inch layer of unsifted compost on soil as a mulch, or spread a 1-2 inch layer of sifted, weed-seed-free compost on turfgrass as a topdressing. These can be done any time of year to improve soil fertility and reduce watering need.

ON HOUSE PLANTS

Sprinkle a thin layer of compost over house-plant soil to provide nutrients. You can also make a great potting soil by mixing one part compost with two parts sand and/or soil.

DON'T HAVE A GARDEN

You can still make compost and use it on a house plant, give it to a friend, sprinkle it around a street tree, or use it in a community garden.

RESOURCES

MORE COMPOSTING BROCHURES

- Worm Composting
- Compost bins – Sources & Designs

COMPOST EDUCATION CENTER

Stop by the Garden for the Environment (GFE) at 7th Avenue and Lawton Street. The center features many different styles of compost bins and instructional signage. Open all daylight hours. Volunteer hours every Wed. from 10 am - 2 pm and Sat. from 10 am – 4pm.

FREE WORKSHOPS

Sign up for one of our free monthly composting workshops. Call the GFE at 415-731-5627 or become a member of our listserve by e-mailing Info@gardenfortheenvironment.org

BOOKS

Rodale Book of Composting, 1992. G. Gershuny, Saint Martin's Press, New York, NY, 278pp.

Worms Eat My Garbage, 1982. Mary Appelhof, Flower Press, Kalamazoo, MI 100pp.

Backyard Composting, 1992. Harmonious Technologies, Harmonious Press, Ojai, CA, 96pp.

The Worm Book, 1998. Loren Nancarrow, Janet Hogan Taylor, Ten Speed Press, Berkeley, CA.

MORE INFORMATION

The Rotline (415) 731-5627

Garden for the Environment

Office: 451 Hayes Street, SF Ca 94102
(415) 731-5627

Garden: 7th Avenue @ Lawton Street, SF Ca 94122
www.gardenfortheenvironment.org

San Francisco Department of the Environment

11 Grove St., San Francisco, CA 94121
(415) 355-3700

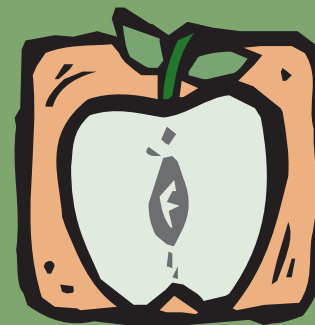
www.sfenvironment.com

Garden for the Environment is sponsored by the San Francisco Department of the Environment.

Basic BACKYARD COMPOSTING

Turn your garbage into gold!

It's easy, it's smart, it's recycling.



WHAT IS COMPOSTING?

Composting is nature's way of recycling. It is a satisfying way to turn your fruit, vegetable and yard trimmings into a dark, crumbly, sweet-smelling soil conditioner.

WHY COMPOST?

- **Saves you money** by lowering garbage bills and replacing store-bought soil conditioners.
- **Helps garden and house plants** by improving the fertility and health of your soil.
- **Decreases need for chemical fertilizers and pesticides.**
- **Saves water** by helping the soil hold moisture and reducing water runoff.
- **Promotes better air quality** in supporting ideal growing conditions for plants thus providing more greenspace, less carbon and a reduction in greenhouse gases.
- **Benefits the environment** by recycling valuable organic resources and extending the life of our landfill.

THE 4 "R'S" OF THE YARD

- **Reduce** the amount of yard trimmings you make by planting slow-growing, drought-tolerant plants.
- **Reuse** yard trimmings by grasscycling (mowing before lawn gets too long, and leaving the clippings on the lawn) and by mulching fallen leaves and chipped prunings (spread them 6 inches deep on paths and around trees and shrubs).
- **Recycle** remaining yard trimmings by composting. This brochure shows you how.
- **Restore** the environment with thriving gardens. It all starts at home.



CHOOSE A SYSTEM

SYSTEMS FOR FOOD AND YARD TRIMMINGS

RODENT RESISTANT BINS

- For fruit, vegetable & yard trimmings (using “Mixed” compost recipe)
- For yard trimmings alone (using “No-fuss” recipe)
- Bins require a lid, floor, & no holes bigger than 1/4 inch

OPEN PILES AND SIMPLE BINS

- For yard trimmings ONLY (are not rodent resistant)
- Requires “Active” composting (chopping & weekly turning to keep animals out)
- Usually inexpensive or free

SYSTEMS FOR JUST FOOD TRIMMINGS

For more information about the following, see the Worm Composting brochure.

Worm bins

- Takes some time and effort
- For indoors and outdoors
- Produces excellent fertilizer
- Most fun, especially for kids



Closed-air systems

- Low maintenance
- Prone to odor & insect problems



Underground composting

- Requires digging a hole each time you add new materials
- No harvesting necessary



Remember...

Whenever you compost fruit & vegetable trimmings, the Health Department requires a rodent-resistant system. Use a container with a lid, a floor, and holes no bigger than 1/4 inch, or bury food scraps at least one foot under the soil surface. For more information about bins, see the Compost Bins—Sources & Designs brochure.

FOLLOW THE BASICS

Thanks to friendly bugs and worms, composting is as easy as “1-2-3” — no matter which recipe you use!

- 1. CHOP** materials so there's more surface area for microorganisms to chew on.
- 2. MIX** “browns” (dry, woody materials) with “greens” (moist, green materials).
- 3. MAINTAIN** air & water balance by keeping compost as moist as a wrung-out sponge.

Browns, Greens, Air & Water are the “big four” that will keep every compost pile happy.

DO COMPOST:

- Untreated sawdust
- Chopped, woody prunings
- Straw
- Fallen leaves (minimal eucalyptus)
- Tea bags
- Citrus rinds
- Coffee grounds & filters
- Lawn clippings & young weeds
- Fruit & vegetable trimmings
- Herbivore manures, bedding

DON'T COMPOST:

- Meat, bones or fish
- Dairy products or grease
- Grains, beans or breads
- Dog, cat or bird feces
- Sawdust from ply-wood/treated wood
- Diseased plants (in cold piles)
- Weed seeds (in cold piles)
- Fruit & vegetable trimmings (in open piles/simple bins)

RODENT-RESISTANT BINS

MAKE YOUR OWN FROM THE RECIPES BELOW

COLD OR PASSIVE COMPOST

For **yard trimmings ONLY**. Requires a rodent-resistant bin to prevent possible animal nesting.

- **INGREDIENTS:**
Yard trimmings only (browns & greens), water as needed
- **DIRECTIONS:**
Feed chopped or unchopped yard trimmings into bin as you generate them. **Maintain** compost by keeping it as moist as a wrung-out sponge. **Harvest** rich, brown, finished compost from the bottom and center of the pile after 12-18 months.

HOT OR ACTIVE COMPOST

For **fruit, vegetable & yard trimmings together**. This recipe requires a rodent-resistant bin and active maintenance to prevent animal nesting and feeding.

- **INGREDIENTS:**
A cubic yard minimum of fruit, vegetable and yard trimmings (browns & greens), water as needed.
- **DIRECTIONS:**
Feed yard trimmings to your pile as you generate them by chopping them first into pieces 6 inches or smaller. Food scraps need to be buried and mixed into the center of the pile. Never dump and run! Be sure to mix in enough browns to balance your greens. Feed as often as you like. **Maintain** compost by turning or mixing it about once a week. Keep it moist as a wrung-out sponge. **Harvest** rich, brown, finished compost by sifting out coarse, unfinished materials after 3-9 months.

HOT COMPOST

Hot compost happens when you follow the basic “1-2-3” carefully, and the pile is about a cubic yard (3'x3'x3'). Create a balanced diet for the microorganisms in the pile by mixing an equal amount of browns (or carbohydrates for an energy source) and greens (or nitrogen for body building). The more rapidly the beneficial microbes (mostly fungus and bacteria) digest organic materials, the warmer the pile becomes. Heat accelerates composting. When temperatures reach 130 F for three or more days, most of the pathogens and weed seeds are killed. Cold, slow composting will still result in rich compost, but may still carry active weed seeds and plant diseases. If your pile is large enough, moist enough, and well chopped, but not heating up, (and you want it to) turn it and mix in some greens like grass clippings. For faster hot composting and better weed-seed kill, turn or mix your hot pile about once a week.

TROUBLESHOOTING

SYMPTOMS	PROBLEMS	SOLUTIONS
Pile not composting	Too dry	Add water until slightly damp & turn (mix)
	Too much brown matter	Add fresh green matter or organic nitrogen fertilizer & turn
Pile smells rotten/attracts flies	Too wet/too many food scraps or lawn clippings	Turn & add browns (dry, woody materials) or dry soil
	Food scraps exposed	Bury & mix food scraps into pile
	Non-compostables	Remove meat, dairy, grease, etc. & turn
Rodents in pile	Food scraps in open bin/holes larger than 1/4 inch/ non compostables	Use traps or baits, rodent-proof bin, remove meat, grease, etc. & turn