



Sustainable!

ST. CLOUD AREA

JOINT PLANNING DISTRICT

Backyard Composting



WHAT IS COMPOSTING?

Composting is the natural breakdown of organic materials. The product, compost, is the rich organic soil that is made as microorganisms decompose yard and kitchen wastes.

BEST PRACTICE AREA: WASTE REDUCTION

DID YOU KNOW?

Food scraps were 12.7% of all waste generated in 2008. Only 2.5% of all waste food was composted in 2008—the rest went to landfill or incinerators.

COMPOST BENEFITS

- Recycled waste and resources are used in the most efficient manner.
- Builds good soil structure, improves aeration
- Holds moisture, protecting against drought
- Encourages soil fertility and resists erosion
- Grows more nutritious food

DO COMPOST:

- Vegetable scraps
- Citrus rinds
- Grass clippings
- Leaves
- Weeds
- Bark, wood ashes
- Horse manure
- Small garden clippings
- Small stalks, stems, and vines

DON'T COMPOST:

- Meat/Poultry/Fish
- Fat/Vegetable oils
- Bones
- Dairy products
- Plastics or synthetics

GETTING STARTED

Locate the compost "heap" in an area where water will not stand. Decide if you would like your pile contained—this is not necessary, but helps keep it from spreading. For fast, efficient composting, a pile must be large enough to hold heat and moisture, yet small enough to admit air to the center. A good size is 1 cubic yard, or 3 ft. by 3 ft. by 3 ft.

RECIPE FOR GOOD COMPOST

Brown Stuff 50-70% OF VOLUME (leaves, hay, woody dry matter)

"Browns" are rich in carbon and carbohydrates, giving energy to composting microorganisms. It is good to moisten browns as you add them, or use browns to absorb excess moisture.

Green Stuff 30-50% OF VOLUME (grass, garbage, manure)

"Greens" are fresh, damp materials that quickly decompose on their own. Their nitrogen is key in protein for the microbes. "Greens" are also the source of most odors. They should be mixed in completely or in layers with "browns" (always cover food scraps!) Otherwise, greens can collapse in volume, lose air, and putrefy.

Black Stuff 0-5% OF VOLUME

"Blacks" are the inoculant, like yeast in bread, which starts the process. Dark soil or compost contains millions of soil organisms that can jump-start the pile.

Air OPEN SIDED BIN, TURN PILE

Most microbes that break down compost are aerobic, meaning they need air. Without air, anaerobic bacterium can grow and smell like putrefying garbage! "Toss" your pile like a salad to ensure air flow.

USING YOUR COMPOST

Compost is ready when it turns a rich, dark brown color and has an earthy smell. The time required to fully compost materials will vary from six weeks to one year depending on pile type, temperature, moisture content and aeration. The three most common uses for finished compost are:

Mulch: spread 1-3 inches around plants and bare soil to prevent erosion, control weed growth, and conserve water.

Soil Amendment: work 2-3 inches of compost into the top six inches of soil each time you start a new garden or plant trees or shrubs.

Potting Mix: sift compost through a ¼ inch screen and mix two parts commercial potting soil with one part compost

