

PROPER RECYCLING COMPOSTING

A Guide to doing it right in Lawrence and Mercer Counties.



What is Composting?

Composting is the human intervention in the natural decay process. In nature, this process can take up to two years. We can shorten this process to six to seven weeks by adjusting and maintaining the moisture, oxygen, and Nitrogen content of the organic materials that we are composting.

Why is Composting Important?

Food and yard waste make up about 30% of our waste stream. Composting is a great way to reduce our waste, save landfill space, sequester carbon, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Finished compost is an excellent soil amendment and a great way to improve your soil.

Residents and businesses in municipalities of more than 5,000 people are required by State law to separate leaf waste from other waste. These municipalities must also provide a collection program for the material.

Do I need a Compost Bin?

You can compost with or without a bin. People who want to use a bin can build their own or purchase a commercially available bin. There are plans available online to build a variety of bins.

How do I Compost?

1. First, pick a location for your composite pile. It should be convenient for you, partly shaded, dry, and flat. Items to consider when picking a location include your neighbors, water supply, and end use of the finish compost.
2. Next add your materials. The ideal ratio is three parts brown materials to one part green material. Green material is higher Nitrogen which feeds the microbes that drive the compost process. See back side for common brown and green materials. You may substitute a small amount of a Nitrogen fertilizer if you don't have green material available. Conversely, you can use sawdust or shredded paper/cardboard if you are short on brown materials.
3. Make sure your compost pile has sufficient moisture. It should feel slightly moist. If it is too dry, add water, and if it is too wet, add material.
4. Turn (mix) the pile every seven days. Check the moisture content after turning.
5. You should have compost in six to seven weeks if you followed the 3:1 recipe, turned it regularly, and maintained the proper moisture content.

 www.mercercountypa.gov/recycling

www.lawrencecountypa.gov/recycling

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Recycling/Solid Waste Department
(724) 658-6925





WHAT CAN I USE COMPOST FOR?

Finished compost is a great soil amendment that should be mixed in with the top 6 inches of soil. Compost is also a suitable mulch. Compost can be used as a potting mix - more than a quarter to a third of the total potting mix should be compost.

What should I avoid in my Compost Bin?

- Meat, Poultry, & Fish
- Diseased Plants
- Weeds w/Seeds
- Coal Ash
- Dairy Products
- Pet Feces
- Branches
- Bones
- Cooking Oil/Oily Foods
- Invasive Weeds
- Treated Sawdust

Common Brown Material

- Leaves
- Bark
- Straw
- Pine Needles
- Twigs
- Newsprint
- Cardboard
- Wood Chips
- Sawdust

Common Green Material

- Grass Clippings
- Vegetable Scraps
- Fruit Rinds/Peels
- Manure
- Coffee Grounds
- Pumpkin Shells
- Seaweed/Pond Algae

There are many sources of information available that cover all aspects of backyard composting. Be sure to visit our website to download our "Keep it at Home: Compost" booklet for more detailed information.

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