

**COMPOST FLOW CHART**

Moisture & Aeration

The microbes in the compost need a certain amount of water to function. Each compost pile has a unique set of conditions, including the type of materials being composted, the size of the pile, and the climate. To ensure effective composting, it’s important to maintain the right balance of moisture and aeration. If the pile is too wet or too dry, the composting process will slow down or stop altogether.

Time & Temperature

As the materials decompose, they release heat. This heat is what makes composting efficient and helps to kill any pesky weeds or pathogens. The faster the composting, the hotter the pile will get. If you use materials with large amounts of sugar (like grass clippings), the pile can get very hot. If you use materials with more texture (like leaves), the pile will stay cooler. The size of the pile also matters. Smaller piles tend to cool off faster than larger piles.

**Other Resources**

- **Materials for Home Composting** (supplemental SCRSWS brochure on C:N Ratios), 2014
- **Clean Green programs for food/scrap** - contact your garbage hauler
- **Worms Eat My Garbage** by Mary Appelhof, Flowerfield Enterprises, LLC, 1997

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**Spokane County Master Composter/Recycler Program**

2902 S. Geiger Blvd. Spokane, WA 99224

The Master Composter/Recycler Program is sponsored by the Spokane County Regional Solid Waste System. Master Composters/Recyclers are volunteers who are working to promote the practice of home composting throughout Spokane County.

Recycling Hot Line 477-6800
spokanecountsoldsolidwaste.org

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**HOME COMPOSTING**

**What is Compost?**

It is a dark, crumbly, and earthy-smelling form of decomposing organic matter.

**Why should I make compost?**

Composting is the most practical and convenient way to handle your yard wastes. It can be easier and cheaper than bagging these wastes or taking them to the transfer station. Composting is also a good way to improve your soil. If you have a garden, a lawn, trees, shrubs, or even planter boxes, you have a use for compost.

**How can I use compost?**

Compost can be used to improve the health of your soil. It can be used to improve the moisture retention of your soil. It can be used to improve the aeration of your soil. It can be used to improve the structure of your soil.

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**What can I compost?**

Anything that was once alive can be composted. This includes garden wastes, small yard wastes, and kitchen wastes. Compost also improves your soil and the plants growing in it. By using compost, you return organic matter to the soil. This helps improve soil structure, increase nutrient content, and improve water retention. It also helps improve the health of your plants. Compost is a natural and effective way to improve your soil. It is a dark, crumbly, and earthy-smelling form of decomposing organic matter.

**The Essentials of Composting**

With these principles in mind, everyone can make excellent use of their organic wastes.

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**Spokane County Regional Solid Waste System**

One Regional System Serving Many Communities

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**One Regional System Serving Many Communities**

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**Solid Waste System**

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**Master Composters**

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**Composter/Recycler Program**

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**Spokane County Master Composter/Recycler Program**

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**Worms Eat My Garbage**

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**Clean Green programs for food/scrap**

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**SCRSWS brochure on C:N Ratios**, 2014

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**Composting**

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**Home**

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**Compost**

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**What can I compost?**

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**Clean Green programs for food/scrap**

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**SCRSWS brochure on C:N Ratios**, 2014

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Composting Yard Wastes

Holding Units
These simple containers for yard wastes are the least labor-intensive and least time-consuming way to compost.

Which wastes? Non-woody yard wastes are the most appropriate.

How? Place the holding unit where it is most convenient. As weeds without seeds, grass clippings, leaves and harvest remains from garden plants are collected, they can be dropped into the unit. Chopping or shredding wastes, alternating high-carbon and high-nitrogen materials, and keeping up good moisture and aeration will all speed the process.

Advantages & disadvantages For yard wastes this is the simplest method. The units can be portable, moving wherever needed in the garden. This method can take from 6 months to 2 years to compost organic materials, so only you need to be patient.

Variations Holding units can be made of circles of hardware cloth, old wooden pallets, or wood and wire. Sod can also be composted with or without the holding unit, by turning sections of sod over, making sure that there is adequate moisture, and covering the sod with black plastic.

Turning Units
This series of three or more bins allows wastes to be turned on a regular schedule. Turning units are most appropriate for gardeners with a large volume of yard waste and the desire to make high-quality compost.

Which wastes? Non-woody yard wastes are appropriate. Kitchen wastes without meat, bones, dairy products or fatty foods can be added to the center of a pile if it is turned weekly and reaches high temperatures.

How? Alternate the layering of high-carbon and high-nitrogen materials to approximately a 30:1 ratio. These should be moistened to the damp sponge stage. The pile temperature should be checked 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. See the Rodale Guide to Composting in your library for more information on hot composting.

Advantages & disadvantages This method produces a high-quality compost in a short time utilizing a substantial input of labor.

Variations The unit can be built of wood/plastic lumber, a combination of wood and wire, or concrete block. Another type of turning unit is a barrel composter, which tumbles the wastes for aeration.

The following troubleshooting chart is a guide to more efficient composting using a turning unit.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SYMPTOM</th>
<th>PROBLEM</th>
<th>SOLUTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The compost</td>
<td>has a bad odor</td>
<td>Not enough air or too much nitrogen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The center</td>
<td>of the pile is dry</td>
<td>Not enough water.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The compost</td>
<td>is damp &amp; warm in the middle, but nowhere else</td>
<td>Too small.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The heap is</td>
<td>damp and sweet-smelling but still will not heat up</td>
<td>Lack of nitrogen.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Composting Food Wastes

Mulching
Yard wastes can be used for weed control and water retention.

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

How? You can simply spread leaves or grass clippings beneath plantings. For woody materials up to 1” in diameter, rent or purchase a chipper/shredder. Recommendations for organic mulch are:

- Woody material (3-4” deep)
- Dry grass clippings (1-2” deep)

Keep material away from plant stems.

Advantages & disadvantages All yard wastes will work first as a mulch and then, as decomposition proceeds, as a soil enrichment. A disadvantage of mulching with woody yard wastes is that you may have to buy or rent power equipment.

Variations Use chipped materials for informal garden paths.

Soil Incorporation
Burying your organic wastes is the simplest method of composting.

Which wastes? Garden and yard wastes only. Burial of food wastes is illegal in some incorporated areas.

How? Everything should be buried at least 8 inches below the surface. Holes can be filled and covered, becoming usable garden spaces the following season.

Advantages & disadvantages This is a simple method, but because of the absence of air some nutrients will be lost. Rodents and dogs can become a problem with wastes buried less than 6 inches deep.

Variations Using a post hole digger, wastes can be incorporated into the soil near the drip line of trees or shrubs and in small garden spaces.

Vermicomposting
Feeding earthworms in wooden bins is a good way to make high-quality compost from food scraps. Use Red Wiggler worms.

Which wastes? Kitchen scraps without meat, bones, dairy products or fatty foods.

How? Fill a bin with moistened bedding such as shredded newspaper for the worms. Rotate the burying of food wastes throughout the worm bin. Every 3-6 months the worm population should be divided and moved to fresh bedding. Refer to Worms Eat My Garbage by Mary Applehof (available at some library branches) for more information.

Advantages & disadvantages This is an efficient way to convert food wastes into a high-quality soil amendment for house plants, seedling transplants, or general garden use. The worms themselves are a useful product for fishing.

Variations A stationary outdoor bin can be used in all but the coldest months, or a portable indoor/ outdoor bin can be used year-round.

For More Information
For information on the Master Composter/Recycler Program, or for help with composting or recycling questions, call the Recycling Hot Line at the Spokane County Regional Solid Waste System, 477-6800 or go to www.spokanecountysolidwaste.org.

Our appreciation is extended to the Seattle Engineering Department Solid Waste Utility and the Seattle Tilth Association for allowing us to utilize this brochure information which was designed for their Community Composting Education Program.