COMPOST FLOW CHART

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Why Should I Make Compost?
Anything that was once alive can be composted. Yard wastes, such as fallen leaves, grass clippings, weeds, and the remains of garden plants, make excellent compost. Woody yard wastes can be clipped and sawed down to a size useful for the wood stove or fireplace. If you can, these can be run through a shredder for more efficient and quicker composting. Used as mulch or for paths, they will eventually decompose and become compost.

What Can I Compost?
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Care must be taken when composting kitchen scraps. Compost them only by the methods outlined in this brochure. Meat, bones and other fats (such as cheese, salad dressing, and leftover cooking oil) should be put in the garbage. Fatty foods (such as cheese, salad dressing, and leftover cooking oil) should be put in the garbage. Fatty foods (such as cheese, salad dressing, and leftover cooking oil) should be put in the garbage. Fatty foods (such as cheese, salad dressing, and leftover cooking oil) should be put in the garbage. Fatty foods (such as cheese, salad dressing, and leftover cooking oil) should be put in the garbage. Fatty foods (such as cheese, salad dressing, and leftover cooking oil) should be put in the garbage.

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The Essentials of Composting

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

Biography
The compost pile is really a farming microbe farm. Bacteria start the process of breaking down organic matter. They are the first to break down plant tissue and also the most numerous and effective decomposers. Fungi and protozoans soon join the bacteria and, somewhat later in the cycle, centipedes, millipedes, beetles and earthworms do their part.

Materials
Anything growing in your yard can be composted. Combine organic matter and carbon, from the cells of dead plants and dead microbes, to fuel their activity. The micro-organisms use the carbon in leaves or woody wastes as an energy source. Nitrogen provides the microbes with the raw protein to build their bodies. Everything organic has a ratio of carbon to nitrogen (C:N) in its tissues, ranging from 500:1 for sawdust, to 15:1 for table scraps. A C:N ratio of 30:1 is ideal for the activity of compost microbes. This balance can be achieved by mixing two parts grass clippings (which have a C:N ratio of 30:1) with one part fallen leaves (60:1) in your compost. Layering can be useful in arriving at these proportions, but a complete mixing of ingredients is preferable for the composting process. Other materials can also be used, such as weeds and garden waste.

Altitudes of composting are not all the same. They function best when the compost materials are about as moist as a wrung-out sponge, and are provided with many air passages. Extremes of sun or rain can adversely affect this moisture balance in your pile.

The faster the composting, the hotter the pile. If you use materials with a proper C:N ratio, provide a large amount of surface area and a big enough volume, and see that moisture and aeration are adequate, you will have a hot, fast compost (not enough to burn your hand) and will probably want to use the running unit discussed in the next section. If you just want to deal with your yard wastes in an inexpensive, easy, non-polluting way, the holding unit also discussed on the next page will serve you well.

Compost is a dark, crumbly, and earthy-smelling form of decomposing organic matter. Compost is the most practical and inexpensive, easy, non-polluting way, the holding unit also discussed on the next page will serve you well.
Composting Yard Wastes

Holding Units

These simple containers for yard wastes are the least labor and 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 words, grass, clippings, leaves and harvest remains from garden plants are collected, they can be dropped into the unit. Chopping or shredding units, 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 to wherever needed in the garden. This method can take from 6 months to 2 years to compost organic materials, which tumbles the wastes for aeration. Another type of turning unit is the barrel composter, which tumbles the wastes for aeration.

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

SYMPTOMS
The heap is damp & warm but not heat up.

The heap is damp & warm but still will not heat up.

The compost is damp & warm in the middle, but nowhere else.

The compost has a bad odor.

The compost is too small.

Which wastes?
Non-woody yard wastes are appropriate. Kitchen wastes without meat, bones 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. Dampens 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 as 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.

Turning Units

This is a series of three or more bins that allows waste 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.

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How? Turn the waste composting unit, by turning sections of it over, making sure that weed seeds (and pathogens if present) may persist in the compost.

Advantages & disadvantages. Composting yard wastes to be turned on a regular schedule. Turning units are the least labor and time-consuming way to compost. Kitchen wastes without meat, bones or fatty foods can be added to the center of a pile if it is turned weekly and reaches high temperatures.

Appelhof (available at some library branches) for more information.

Mulching

Yard wastes can be used for weed control and water retaining. Which wastes? Woody yard wastes, leaves, and grass clippings.

How? You can simply spread leaves or grass clippings around plantings. For woody materials up to 1” in diameter, rent or purchase a chipper/shredder. Tree services, if they are in your neighborhood, often will deliver wood chips free.

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 or make arrangements with a tree service.

Variations. Use chipped materials for informal garden paths.

Earthworm Compost

Feeding earthworms in wooden bins is a good way to make high-quality compost from food scraps.

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

How? Fill a bin with moistened bedding such as peat moss for the worms. Rotate the burning 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 Appelhof (available at some library branches) for more information.

Advantages & disadvantages. This is an efficient way to convert food wastes into high-quality soil for houseplants, seedling transplants, or general garden use. The worms themselves are a useful product for fishing. However, worm composting is a more expensive and complicated than soil incorporation for dealing with food wastes.

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 on composting and many other topics, contact the Horticulture Diagnostic Lab at 631-727-4126 or 631-581-4223 or visit our website at www.ccesuffolk.org

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