

Compost... BACKYARD

GOLD

October 2004

WHY COMPOST?

Compost returns nutrients and minerals to the soil.

Compost improves soil aeration, texture, and drainage.

As mulch, compost controls weeds and erosion, protects plant roots, saves water, and prevents soil diseases.

The compost process has naturally replenished the earth for thousands of years.

So the question is not “Why Compost?” but rather, “Why NOT Compost?”

HOW DO I START?

ALL YOU NEED IS YOUR KITCHEN FOOD SCRAP, SOME LEAVES OR WOOD CHIPS AND, ——— *MOST IMPORTANT* ——— TIME AND MOISTURE

Will It Be Expensive?

That depends on you. Fancy compost tumblers may cost several hundred dollars, but a barrel or wooden bin will do the job.

Will It Smell Bad?

A healthy compost pile has an “earthy” smell. A foul odor means too little air. Punch some holes in your pile or turn it.

Will It Be A Lot Of Work?

That depends on you again. You may choose to turn your pile every few days to accelerate the process, but rest assured, compost will happen!

How Long Will It Take?

In warm months you can expect a steady stream of compost beginning 4 to 6 weeks after you start. The process will slow over the winter and pick up again in the spring.

Will My Compost Attract Pests?

Keeping food scraps layered between leaves and other non-food items will discourage pests. The inside of your compost pile will reach 160 degrees—too hot for pests!



WHAT SHOULD I PUT IN MY COMPOST PILE?

A successful compost pile likes a blend of green (nitrogen-rich) and brown (carbon-rich) materials. A good ration is 2 : 1; green : brown.

Green materials include green grass, fruit scraps, vegetable waste, coffee grounds, bread, and cow, pig, horse, and poultry manure.

Brown materials include dried materials such as dried grass and leaves, paper products, straw, hay, wood chips, wood ash and sawdust.



WHAT SHOULD I LEAVE OUT OF MY PILE?

Avoid fatty foods, meats, milk products, peanut butter, salad dressing, mayonnaise, fish, bones, and dog or cat manure.



Additional Resources-Web Sites

- Home Composting
<http://www.montana.edu/wwwpb/pubs/mt9203.html>
- Home Composting
<http://www.umext.maine.edu/onlinepubs/htmpubs/1143.htm>
- Composting
<http://www.solidwaste.org/comessen.htm>
- Urban Agricultural Notes
Composting With Red Wiggler Worms
<http://www.cityfarmer.org/wormcomp61.html>

Additional Resources-Magazines

- Composting News

Additional Resources-Books

- The Rodale Book of Composting
Deborah L. Martin (Ed), et al (Feb 92)
- Let It Rot: The Gardener's Guide to Composting
by Stu Campbell (Mar 98)
- Easy Composting by James Ball, et al
- Secrets to Great Soil: A Grower's Guide to Composting, Mulching, and Creating Healthy, Fertile Soil for Your Garden
(Feb 98)

Additional Resources-For Kids

- Worms Eat My Garbage (M. Appelhof)
Age 9-12
- Compost Critters (D. Lavies) Age 9-12
- Compost, By Gosh (M. E. Portman)
Age 4-8
- Compost: Growing Gardens From Your Garbage
(Linda Glaser) Age 3-8
- Composting for Kids - PC Slide Show
<http://aggiehorticulture.tamu.edu/sustainable/slidesets/kidscompost/>

[cover.html](#)

Composting is a natural process that can eliminate much household waste.

The composter receives quality soil amendments, in the convenience of his own yard — all courtesy of Mother Nature. And compost can take the place of expensive chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and mulches.



MONTANA DEPARTMENT
OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY
Air, Energy, and Pollution Prevention Bureau
Business and Community Assistance Program

For more information on composting
and other waste reduction ideas, call
1-800-433-8773

www.deq.state.mt.us

