

Resources

Free Workshops

Pre-registration preferred for our composting workshops. See current schedule on our website www.ucanr.edu/compost

Books

Backyard Composting, 1992. Harmonious Technologies, Harmonious Press, Ojai, CA. 96pp.

Let it Rot! Stu Campbell, Garden Way Publishing, Pownal, VT, 144 pp

Rodale Book of Composting, 1992, G.Gershuny, Saint Martin's Press, New York, NY, 278 pp.

About the Master Composter Program

The Composting Education Program teaches a multi-week training course in organic waste management to interested volunteers. Training consists of approximately 50 hours of classroom and hands-on instruction. Volunteers agree to give back 50 hours of volunteer service in the form of educational outreach.

Rotline:

408-918-4640

Website:

www.ucanr.edu/compost

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Basic Composting

Turn your garbage into gold!



Composting Education Program
COMMUNITY • HOME • CLASSROOM

www.ucanr.edu/compost



Why Compost?

Composting is nature's way of recycling. It is a satisfying way to turn your fruit, vegetable and yard trimmings into a dark, crumbly, sweet-smelling soil amendment that has a positive effect on the environment!

- **Saves you money** by lowering garbage bills and replacing store-bought soil conditioners.
- **Helps garden and house plants** by improving the fertility and health of your soil.
- **Saves water** by helping the soil hold moisture and reducing water runoff.
- **Benefits the environment** by recycling valuable organic resources and extending the life of our landfills.

Reduce – the amount of yard trimmings you make by planting slow-growing, drought-tolerant plants.

Reuse – yard trimmings by grasscycling (mowing more often and leaving the clippings on the lawn) and by mulching fallen leaves and chipped prunings.

Recycle – remaining yard trimmings by composting. This brochure shows you how.

Restore – the environment with thriving gardens. It all starts at home.

Working with compost!

Not only does composting help your garden and yard, it also helps house plants! When compost looks like soil and smells sweet and earthy, it is ready to use. Here are some of the most common ways to use compost:

In the Garden:

Before planting, mix a 4" to 8" layer of compost into newly reclaimed or poor soils. Mix a 1/2" to 3" layer of compost into annual garden beds at least once a year. Compost will add nutrients and beneficial microbes, hold water and improve growth.



Around the Yard:

Spread a 1" to 6" layer of coarse compost on soil as a mulch, or spread a 1/2" layer of sifted, seed-free compost on turfgrass as a topdressing. These can be done anytime of year to improve soil fertility and reduce water needs.

On House Plants:

Sprinkle a thin layer of compost over house plants to provide nutrients. You can also make a great potting soil by mixing one part compost with two parts sand and/or soil.

Don't Have a Garden:

You can still make compost and use it on a house plant, give it to a friend, sprinkle it around a street tree, or use it in community garden.

Choose a System

Systems for Food & Yard Trimmings Rodent-resistant bins



- For fruit, vegetable & yard trimmings (using “mixed” compost recipe)
- For yard trimmings alone (using “no-fuss” recipe)
- Bins require sides, lid & no holes bigger than 1/4”



Open piles & simple bins

- For yard trimmings ONLY
- Requires “active” composting (chopping & regular turning to keep animals out)
- Usually inexpensive or free

SYSTEMS FOR JUST FOOD WASTE

For more information, see the Worm Composting & Other Methods brochure.



Worm bins

- Most fun! Takes some time & effort
- For indoors or outdoors
- Produces excellent vermicompost

Remember... Whenever you compost fruit & vegetable trimmings, use a container with sides, lid, and no holes bigger than 1/4”, or bury food scraps at least one foot under soil surface.

Follow the Basics

Thanks to friendly bugs and worms, composting is as “1-2-3” - no matter which recipe you use!

- 1 CHOP** materials if you want them to break-down more quickly.
- 2 MIX** “browns” (dry, woody materials) with “greens” (moist, green materials).
- 3 MAINTAIN** air & water balance by keeping compost as moist as a wrung-out sponge.

Browns, greens, air & water are the “big four” that will keep every compost pile happy.

DO COMPOST	DON'T COMPOST
Most sawdusts	Meat, bones, or fish
Chopped, woody prunings	Dairy products or grease
Pine needles	Grains, beans, or breads
Fallen leaves	Dog, cat, or bird feces
Tea bags	Sawdust from plywood/treated wood
Citrus rinds	Diseased plants (in cold piles)
Coffee grounds & filters	Fruit & vegetable trimmings (in open piles/ simple bins)
Lawn clippings & young weeds	Herbivore manures

Hot compost happens when you follow the basic “1-2-3” carefully, and the pile is about a cubic yard (3x3x3). Heat can accelerate composting and destroy seeds and plant diseases, but is not necessary. Cold, slow piles are just as good. If your pile is large enough, moist, and well chopped but not heating up, you can turn it and mix in some greens such as grass clippings or an organic nitrogen fertilizer. For faster hot composting and better seed destruction, turn or mix and water your hot pile about once a week.

Compost Recipes

For Rodent-Resistant Bins

“No-Fuss” Compost:

For yard trimmings ONLY. Requires a rodent-resistant bin to prevent animal nesting.

Ingredients:

Yard trimmings only (browns & greens), water as needed and aerate.

Directions:

Feed chopped or unchopped yard trimmings into bin as you generate them. Maintain compost by keeping it as moist as a wrung-out sponge. Harvest rich, brown finished compost from the bottom and center of the pile after 12 to 18 months.

“Mixed” Compost:

For fruit, vegetable & yard trimmings together. This recipe requires a rodent-resistant bin and active maintenance to prevent animal nesting and feeding.

Ingredients:

Fruit, vegetable & yard trimmings (browns & greens), water as needed.

Directions:

Feed yard trimmings to your compost by chopping them into small pieces (woody material 1 in diameter or smaller) or grinding them, then mix them into the pile. Fill the bin. Food scraps need to be buried and mixed into the center of the pile. Never dump and run! Be sure to mix in enough browns to balance your greens. Feed as often as you like. Maintain compost by turning or mixing it about once a week. Keep it moist as a wrung-out sponge. Harvest rich, brown, finished compost by sifting out coarse, unfinished materials after 3 to 8 months.

A recipe for open piles

“Active” compost:

For yard trimmings ONLY. In open piles & simple bins, active maintenance prevents animal nesting.

Ingredients:

Yard trimmings only (browns & greens), water as needed.

Directions:

Feed yard trimmings to your compost by chopping them into small pieces (woody material 1 in diameter or smaller) or grinding them, then mix them into the pile. Fill the bin. Be sure to balance browns with greens. Maintain pile by turning or mixing it once a week. Keep it as moist as a wrung-out sponge. Covering it with a tarp will help keep it moist. Harvest rich, brown, finished compost by sifting out coarse, unfinished materials after 3 to 8 months.

Troubleshooting

Symptoms	Problems	Solutions
Pile not composting	Too dry	Add water until slightly damp & turn (mix)
	Too much brown matter	Add fresh green matter or organic nitrogen fertilizer & turn
Pile smells rotten/ attracts flies	Too wet/ too many food scraps or lawn clippings	Turn & add browns (dry, woody materials & or dry soil)
	Food scraps exposed	Bury & mix food scraps into pile
	See “Don't Compost”	Remove meat, dairy, grease, etc. & turn
Rodents in pile	Foodscraps in open bin/holes larger than 1/4 in non-compostables	Use traps or baits rodent-proof bin, remove meat, grease, etc. & turn