

Starting A Compost Pile

Composting is a practical way to keep organic waste out of landfills, while lowering gas emissions associated with waste management. Composting creates healthy landscapes and saves money in garbage disposal, fertilizers, mulch and soil.



Step 1: Choose a location and type of holding unit for your compost pile.

A good location is not too far from your house. The heat generated from your compost pile is a byproduct of microbial decomposition, not the sun. Keeping your pile in a relatively shady area will help to keep your pile from drying out. If you live in an urbanized area, think about getting a bin that is enclosed which will help keep pests at bay.



Compost bins can be purchased at RI Resource Recovery. 942-1430 www.rirrc.org



Compost bins can easily be constructed out of pallets or wood.

Step 2: Learning the Compost Recipe

A general ratio of 3 parts carbon (leaves & newspaper) to 1 part nitrogen (vegetable & fruit scraps) should be used when creating a compost pile (see more examples below). One way of composting these materials is to fill your compost bin with carbonaceous material and layer in nitrogenous material as it accumulates. Your compost pile will reduce a third in volume in approximately one week. Always keep fresh food scraps covered with leaves or newspaper. A scrap pail with a carbon filter is an easy way to collect fresh food scraps in your kitchen.



Nitrogenous Materials

Fresh fruit & veg. scraps, non-diseased expired plants, manure, coffee grinds & filter, tea bags, chemical-free grass clippings, etc.

Carbonaceous Materials

Fall leaves, straw, corn & tomato stalks, newspaper & cardboard, wood chips, pine needles, bark, woody prunings, etc.

To expedite the compost process try to shred, cut and chop both green & brown materials before putting into your pile.

Step 3: Learning What Not to Compost

For safety purposes items that should not be composted at home are; meat, bones, fat, grease, oils, peanut butter, dairy products, cooked foods with sauces or butter, dog & cat manure, cat litter, diseased plants, weeds gone to seed, weeds that spread by roots and runners (vines), invasive plant species, chemically treated grass or plants, poisonous plants and inorganic wastes (metal, plastic, glass).

Step 4: Adding Oxygen & Moisture

Oxygen is required by the microorganisms working in your pile to properly function. Aerating your pile will attract the right kinds of microorganisms and will keep your compost pile odor free. Compost piles should be aerated at least 1-3 times a week (less in the winter) with either a pitch fork, metal bar or a compost aerator. Simply plunge your tool into the compost pile and move back and forth to allow the oxygen to distribute. In terms of moisture, your compost pile should take on the consistency of a damp wrung out sponge. If the pile is too dry, spray with water from a rain barrel or hose. If the pile is too wet, add carbonaceous material (leaves, shredded newspaper) and distribute to reabsorb the water.



Step 5: Harvesting Compost

The compost rate is determined by steps 1-4 in addition to the temperature achieved during the process. If manure is used, allow your compost to break down for at least 9-12 months to ensure breakdown of harmful pathogens.. At some point materials should stop being added to the pile to allow items to completely break down. Now is a good time to start a new pile. Sift your original pile when it is comprised mostly of unrecognizable material and appears to be fully broken down with no heat being produced (a compost thermometer can be used to determine temperature). A handmade sifter is easy to make right at home which helps to remove things like woody debris.



Step 6: Applying Compost

Finished compost normally has a pH that is neutral, but can be tested for pH if unsure. Finished compost can be used as a soil amendment, mulch, when transplanting/dividing or as a component potting mixes.

For More Information:

Visit: <http://cels.uri.edu/outreach>

Facebook: URI Outreach Center

Twitter: URIOutreach

URI Outreach Center 3 East Alumni Ave, Kingston, RI 02881 (401)874-2900 outreach@uri.edu