

What is Compost?

Compost is organic matter, such as yard waste and food scraps, that has decomposed. Fungi, bacteria, and other micro-organisms, along with insects, all help in this process of decomposition.

Composting is Easy!

Composting happens naturally over time, but with a little effort, you can speed things up dramatically. This brochure provides basic composting methods, bin purchasing information, and a wealth of other resources to get you on your way to successful composting.

5 Reasons to Compost in Your Back Yard

1. Creates a free, nutrient-rich soil amendment for healthy gardens.
2. Using compost conserves water, controls weeds and reduces or eliminates the need for chemical fertilizers.
3. Reduces your garbage so you can save money on trash disposal costs.
4. Conserves resources and helps create a sustainable future.
5. Saves landfill space for current and future generations!



Did you know that food waste, yard waste, and compostable paper make up 31% of the average household's waste? Composting these materials can make a big impact on your trash bill while helping your garden!

Resources

Composting Information and Compost Bin Plans

- Attend a workshop (see schedule in this brochure)
- Visit a Demonstration Garden (bin plans available at Closed Loop Park or at www.co.thurston.wa.us/wwm)
- Call the Master Gardener/Master Composter Diagnostic Clinic at (360) 867-2163
- Contact the Master Gardener Foundation of Thurston County at (360) 481-4204

Where to Get Worms

Worm bins need to have only red wiggler worms added. Get them from a friend's bin or through local vendors:

- Wiser Worm Farm at Olympia Farmers Market, (360) 480-3995 or www.wiserwormfarm.com
- Yelm Earthworm and Castings Farm at 1-877-339-6767 or www.yelmworms.com
- Kitsap E-Z Earth at (360) 598-4728 or www.kitsapezeearth.com

Books

- Let it Rot, by Stu Campbell
- Compost, by Ken Thompson
- The Complete Compost Gardening Guide, by Barbara Pleasant and Deborah L. Martin
- Worms Eat my Garbage, by Mary Appelhoff
- Compost by Gosh! by Michelle Eva Portman (children's book)

Internet

www.co.thurston.wa.us/wwm

www.olympiawa.gov/cityutilities/garbage

www.seattleilth.org/learn/resources-1/compost/compost/

Become a Master Composter!

Classes available. For details, call the Master Gardener/Master Composter Program Manager at (360) 867-2162.

Composting at Home 2009



- Learn the Basics of Home Composting
- 2009 Composting Workshop Schedule

Yard and Food Waste Composting

If you plan on composting food along with your yard waste, it is best to use a bin designed to deter pests and rodents. Bins should be fully contained with a lid and base. (Plastic bases for Earth Machines are available for an additional price.) A sheet of galvanized mesh (1/4 inch holes or smaller) secured to the bottom of the bin can be used as a base.



Compostable Waste

Cold Composting is a slow process – but maintenance free. Just create a pile with a mixture of green and brown materials and keep adding to it. In 1-2 years, the materials at the bottom will be compost.

Hot Composting is usually done in some type of bin. It does require a bit of time and effort, as described below, and will produce compost in about 2-3 months.

Pile Size – A pile should be at least 1 cubic yard (3' x 3' x 3') to generate the necessary heat. Most ready-to-use bins are about this size. Cover the pile with a lid, tarp, plastic sheet, or cardboard.

Recipes - Generally speaking, mix half "brown" material (dry, coarse, and carbon rich) with half "green" material (moist, dense, and nitrogen rich). Carbon and nitrogen contents vary depending on the material, so experiment with the material that you have on hand. A simple recipe is half green grass to half dry leaves.

Particle Size - Small particles will decompose faster than large ones. To help speed up the composting process, chop or shred large pieces. Some people use a chipper or an old lawnmower to chop up the material. Even a weed eater placed inside a garbage can may be used to quickly chop yard waste.

Moisture - Materials in the pile should be about the consistency of a damp sponge. Covering the pile with a black piece of plastic will help control moisture levels.

Temperature - The ideal temperature for the center of the pile is 130° – 145° F, which is too hot to touch! You can check the heat using a compost thermometer. Thermometers are sold at some nurseries and through the Master Gardener Foundation.

Turn the Pile - Oxygen is essential to keep micro-organisms and other decomposers alive and well. Turn or mix the pile once a week (or more), or as soon as the center begins to cool down.



Collection Container

Cure the Compost - When the contents of the compost pile begin looking like rich dark crumbly soil, with a sweet smell, it's time to cure it for use in your garden. Compost that has not cured could damage plants. Just remove the finished compost from the bin, keep the compost on the soil, cover the finished pile of compost with a tarp or plastic sheet and let sit for 30 days. Then it will be ready to mix into the soil or use as mulch.

The sponsoring public agencies listed below are committed to the non-discriminatory treatment of all persons in employment and the delivery of services and resources.



What You Can Compost

Greens (nitrogen-rich material)

Green grass clippings and leaves, plant trimmings, manure (livestock), fruits and vegetables, pet and human hair, and kitchen scraps* (such as coffee grounds, egg shells, rinds, peelings, old produce, stale bread, and pasta).

* Food scraps go in enclosed bins only.

Browns (carbon-rich material)

Twigs, wood chips, untreated wood, sawdust or shavings, pine needles, plant stalks, branches, dried leaves, straw, dry grass clippings, paper egg cartons, paper towels and napkins, paper plates, shredded newspaper and non-glossy junk mail, cardboard, paper coffee filters.

Do Not Add

No meat, dairy, oil, or oily foods since these items can attract pests. No clippings recently treated with herbicides, diseased plants, invasive and noxious plants, dog or cat feces, weed seeds, dryer lint, barbecue ashes/coal, and charcoal.

Generally, you can find Master Composters for composting advice and bin sales at the following annual events:
The Junior League Gift and Garden event at Saint Martin's University, Garden Rhapsodies, Thurston County Fair, Tenino Farmers Market, the Rainier Roundup at Wilkowski Park, opening day at the Tumwater Farmers Market, and the "BIG Home and Garden Show" at Saint Martin's University.

Compost Bins

Worm Bins

Composting in a worm bin is an excellent composting option for people with limited composting space.



Red Wiggler Worms

Do-It-Yourself Worm Bins



Adding Food To A Worm Bin

Worm bins are shallow enclosed wood or plastic structures (storage tubs) that use live worms to convert food scraps to compost. Bins should have holes for ventilation and drainage, and a tight fitting lid. Place the bin in a location that protects it from temperature extremes, such

as under a shrub or next to a (non-wood) wall, or even inside the garage. Create a bedding in the bin with any combination of damp newspaper, damp cardboard strips, straw, and fall leaves. Add a pound of red wiggler worms (see Resource page for worms). Generally one pound of worms can eat 1/2 pound of food each day. When most of the bedding looks like dark, rich soil, it is time to harvest the compost and re-bed the bin. Generally you will want to re-bed the bin once a year.

Ready-To-Use Bins

You do not need a compost bin in order to compost. However, a bin helps to keep the pile neat, retain pile heat, and can be appropriate for many urban situations.

Biostack, Earth Machine, and worm bin composters are sold to Thurston County residents through the Thurston County Master Gardener Foundation. Other items such as books and compost thermometers are also available through the foundation at workshops or online at: www.compostbinthurstoncounty.com.

There are three ordering methods to choose from:

1. Online at www.compostbinthurstoncounty.com. (Credit cards can be used to order online or you can print out an order form and mail it in with your check.)
2. Mail a check, your name, phone number and address, the quantity, and type of bin you are ordering to: MGFTC (Master Gardener Foundation of Thurston County), P.O. Box 66, Rainier WA 98576.
3. By phone. Call (360) 481-4204.



Plastic Tote Worm Bin

Earth Machine bins are \$40 each (\$86 value).
Biostack bins are \$60 each (\$140 value).
Worm bins are \$28 each and sold at workshops only.

Prices are subject to change.



Biostack

Thurston County Solid Waste subsidizes the price of the Earth Machine and Biostack bins. This offer is for Thurston County residents only, with a limit of three bins total per household, per year. Prices include home delivery within Thurston County (sorry, no P.O. boxes). Non-county residents can contact the Foundation for bin and delivery pricing.



Earth Machine

Using Compost

In Your Garden - Mix compost directly into the soil in your garden and flower beds. You can do this by spreading compost 1-4 inches thick over the existing soil and work into the first 4 inches of topsoil. It's ideal to do this twice a year, and a month before planting.

Topdressing/Mulch - Spread compost around the base of trees, shrubs, and perennials. This helps to prevent water loss through evaporation, and helps to suppress weeds.

Lawn Care - Rake a 1/4-inch sifted layer of compost over the lawn.

Potting Soil - You can make your own potting mix by combining 1 part sifted compost, 1 part sifted loamy soil, and 1 part vermiculite.



Gardening With Compost

Houseplants - You can add 1 part sifted compost to 2 parts packaged potting soil to add additional nutrients when potting plants. You may also rejuvenate the soil in planted pots by working in an inch of compost into the soil twice a year.

Compost Tea - A nutrient-rich drink for your plants. To make the tea place about 2 cups of compost into an old sock, tie the opening shut, and place in a 5-gallon bucket of water to soak overnight. Use the "tea" to water thirsty plants.

2009 Compost Workshops

Master Composters provide FREE compost workshops each year from spring through fall. These workshops include step-by-step instruction on how to turn food and yard wastes into compost. Pre-registration is not required.



Composting Workshop

For the focus of each composting workshop please check the Master Gardener Foundation of Thurston County's website at www.mgftc.org or call (360) 867-2163. All workshops start at 10:30 a.m.

April 25: Closed Loop Park

May 16: Dirt Works

Composting workshops will be offered every hour from 10:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

May 30: Olympia Farmers Market

June 6: Closed Loop Park

July 11: Dirt Works

August 15: Dirt Works

Sept. 12: Closed Loop Park

Sept. 19: Olympia Farmers Market

Oct. 3: Closed Loop Park

Oct. 17: Dirt Works

Demonstration Gardens

Call for season and hours: (360) 867-2163.



Closed Loop Park is located off Hogum Bay Road at the Thurston County Waste & Recovery Center (take exit 111 North off of I-5).



Dirt Works is located on Alta Drive off Capital Mall Drive, behind Yaeger Park and Apple Park apartments.



Olympia Farmers Market is located downtown at the north end of Capitol Way.



Closed Loop Park