



Lane County Public Works  
Waste Management Division  
3100 East 17th Avenue  
Eugene, OR 97403

# Recycler's Guide to Basic Composting



Turn your  
garbage into  
gardener's gold!  
It's easy, it's smart,  
it's recycling.



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## 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 conditioner.

### Composting:

- 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 landfill.

## The 4 "R's" Of The Yard

**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 (spread them 6" deep on paths and around trees and shrubs).

**RECYCLE** remaining yard trimmings by composting. This brochure shows you how.

**RESTORE** the environment with thriving gardens. It all starts at home!

## Compost Works For You

Not only does composting help the environment, but it can help your garden, yard, and house plants too! 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 plant 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, weed-seed free compost on turfgrass as a top dressing. These can be done any time of year to improve soil fertility and reduce watering needs.

### On House Plants

Sprinkle a thin layer of compost over house-plant soil 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 a community garden.

## RESOURCES

For more information about composting visit the City of Eugene website at: [eugenerecycles.org](http://eugenerecycles.org).

**The Master Gardener Program** offers compost education demonstrations and printed information from their office at 783 Grant Street in Eugene and can answer compost questions on their hotline: 541-344-0265.

Visit your local Library or book store. They are full of resources on composting.

# Choose A System

## Systems For Food and Yard Trimmings

### Rodent-Resistant Bins

- For fruit, vegetable and yard trimmings (using "Mixed" compost recipe)
- For yard trimmings alone (using "No-Fuss" recipe)
- Bins require a lid, floor and no holes bigger than 1/4"



### Open Piles & Simple Bins

- For yard trimmings ONLY
- Requires "Active" composting (chopping and weekly turning to keep animals out)
- Usually inexpensive or free



## Systems For Just Food Trimmings

### Worm Bins

- Most fun! Takes some time and effort
- For indoors or outdoors
- Produces excellent fertilizer



### Closed-Air Systems

- Low maintenance
- Prone to odor and insect problems

### Underground Composting

- Requires digging a hole each time you add new materials
- No harvesting necessary

**REMEMBER...** Composting fruit and vegetable trimmings should be done in a rodent-resistant system. Use a container with a secure lid, a solid or mesh floor, and no holes bigger than 1/4 inch, or bury food scraps at least one foot under the soil surface.

# Follow The Basics

Thanks to friendly bugs and worms, composting is as easy 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 and water balance by keeping compost as moist as a wrung-out sponge. Browns, Greens, Air and Water are the "big four" that will keep every compost pile happy.

### DO COMPOST:

BROWNS

- Most sawdusts
- Chopped, woody prunings
- Pine needles
- Fallen leaves
- Tea bags
- Citrus rinds
- Coffee grounds and filters
- Lawn clippings & young weeds
- Fruit & vegetable trimmings
- Herbivore manures

### DON'T:

- Meat, bones or fish
- Dairy products or grease
- Grains, beans or breads
- Dog, cat or bird feces
- Plywood/treated wood and its sawdust
- Diseased plants (in cold piles)
- Fruit and vegetable trimmings (in open piles/simple bins)

**Hot Compost Happens** when you follow the basic "1-2-3" carefully, and the pile is about a cubic yard (3'x3'x3'). Placing your bin in the sun does not create hot composting, biological activity does. Biological activity produces heat, this accelerates composting and kills weed seeds and plant diseases but is not necessary. Cold, slow piles are fine but will not kill weed seeds or pathogens from food scraps. If your pile is large enough, moist, and well chopped, but not heating up, you can turn it and mix in some greens like grass clippings or an organic nitrogen fertilizer. For faster hot composting and better weed-seed kill, turn or mix your hot pile about once a week or so.

# Recipes For Happy Compost Bins

## "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 first into pieces 6" or smaller, then mixing them into the pile. Feed as often as you like.

**Maintain** pile by turning or mixing it about once a week. Keep it as moist as a wet sponge.

**Harvest** rich, brown, finished compost by sifting out coarse, unfinished materials after 3 to 8 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 and yard trimmings (browns & greens), water as needed.

### DIRECTIONS:

**Feed** yard trimmings to your pile as you generate them by chopping them first into pieces 6" or smaller. 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.

# Compost Bin Troubleshooting

SYMPTOMS	PROBLEMS	SOLUTIONS
Pile not composting	Too dry or the center of the pile is dry	Add water until slightly damp & turn (mix) add fresh green wastes
	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, not enough air	Turn & add browns (dry, woody materials) or dry soil
	Food scraps exposed	Bury & mix food scraps into pile
	Rodents in pile/holes larger than 1/4-inch/ non-compostables	Use traps or baits, rodentproof bin, remove meat, grease, etc., & turn
The pile is damp and warm in the middle but nowhere else	Compost pile is too small	Collect more material and mix the old ingredients into a new pile

# Grasscycling

## Going Bagless

Grasscycling is the easiest form of composting. Just leave cut clippings on the lawn!

## Keys to proper grasscycling:

- Remove only one third of the grass blade each time you mow, this not only reduces the size of the clippings, it is also less stressful on the grass.
- Consistent, regular mowing reduces the chances of weeds going to seed and being disbursed naturally in your yard. Never let the grass get over 3" tall.
- Using a sharp blade makes clean cuts, thus reducing the chance for lawn diseases and pests.
- Only mow when the grass is dry.

Leaving grass clippings on your lawn as they decompose contribute enough organic matter and nitrogen that lawn fertilization needs are reduced by about 25% per year.