

Why Compost?

Compost is one of nature's best mulches and soil amendments, and you can use it instead of commercial fertilizers. You can



Compost improves soil structure

make it without spending a cent. Using compost improves soil structure, texture, and aeration and increases the soil's water-holding capacity. Compost loosens clay soils, improves soil fertility and stimulates healthy root development in plants.

How Can I Use Compost?

Compost can be spread in a layer on the soil surface or is dug in.

Most plants, especially trees will benefit from using your compost to top dress the soil.

Larger materials can be used as mulch.

To bolster poor soil with little organic matter, spread 2 to 3 inches of compost over a newly dug surface. Then work the compost into the top 6 inches of earth.

For new lawns, a 2 to 3" layer of compost is best when planting. Established lawns benefit from a ¼ to ½" layer yearly..

To side-dress a plant, work the compost into the soil around the plant, starting about an inch from the stem, out to the drip line, taking care not to disturb the roots. For shallow rooted plants, leave the compost on the soil surface. A 2" layer works best when left on top.

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You can also contact the Butler Soil & Water Conservation District for assistance with:

- Ponds
- Trees
- Stream Bank Erosion
- Drainage Assistance
- Erosion Problems
- Wetland Identification
- and much more



Butler Soil & Water Conservation District

Composting is Easy!



How Do I Compost?

Don't worry, most of the hard work is done by bacteria and other decomposers! The main thing you need to keep in mind are the four things your little micro buddies need:

- Air **The more oxygen available, the faster organic waste can decompose**
- Water **keep the pile moist like a damp sponge**
- Warmth **the creatures will supply this themselves**
- A good balanced diet **see *What Can I Compost?***

You can put the materials in a compost bin or just make a free standing pile. As the decomposers get to work, the pile should start to heat up.

2 Approaches to Composting

Passive composting It might take a long time (a year or two), but eventually organic materials in any type of a pile will break down into finished compost. Check the bottom of the bin after a year or two. When it's ready, use the compost at the bottom of the bin. Continue to add a good mix of materials to have a good supply of finished compost at the ready.

Active composting can produce compost in as little as a month. Turn or stir up the compost pile on a regular basis, at least once or twice a week. Move the hot material in the center of the pile to the outside and the outer material into the center. This key step really decreases composting time because it allows all the material to be exposed to the hot center and increases aeration. Remember to keep the compost as moist as a wrung-out sponge.

What Should My Compost Bin Be Made Of?

You can purchase a variety of bins (Butler SWCD sells Earth Machine compost bins), or you can build your own. Many successful compost bins have been built from concrete blocks, chicken wire, old pallets, and a variety of other materials. In fact, you don't even require anything to hold your compost together, you can create a freestanding compost pile. An advantage of using a bin is that some are great for keeping curious critters out, which is especially important if you plan to compost a lot of food.

A pile that is three feet tall by three feet square will generate enough heat during decomposition to sterilize the compost.

What Can I Compost?

Almost any organic material is suitable. The pile needs a balanced diet or mix of about 30 parts carbon-rich materials, or "browns," and 1 part nitrogen-rich materials, or "greens." If there is too much carbon this slows the process and too much nitrogen can cause the pile to smell. Break your materials into small pieces. The smaller the pieces the quicker you will get finished compost.

Do Compost

Green Stuff (*Nitrogen sources*)

- Grass clippings & garden trimmings
- Fruit & vegetable scraps
- Coffee grounds & filters
- Tea bags
- Egg Shells
- Manure
- Hair and Lint
- Bread and grains

Brown Stuff (*Carbon sources*)

- Hay
- Leaves, twigs
- Pine needles (best chopped or shredded as they break down slowly)
- Corncobs
- Vegetable stalks
- Wood chips, and sawdust

Don't Compost

Green Stuff (*Nitrogen sources*)

- Meat, fish, poultry (these items can be composted but you may attract vermin)
- Dairy products
- Grease or oil
- Pesticide treated grass clippings
- Pet Waste and litter
- Invasive weeds and weed seed heads
- Diseased Plants
- Black walnut tree leaves

Brown Stuff (*Carbon sources*)

- Branches over 1/2 " in diameter
- Sawdust from plywood
- Treated/painted wood
- Coated copy and photo paper
- Colored paper and waxed paper
- Coal or charcoal ash