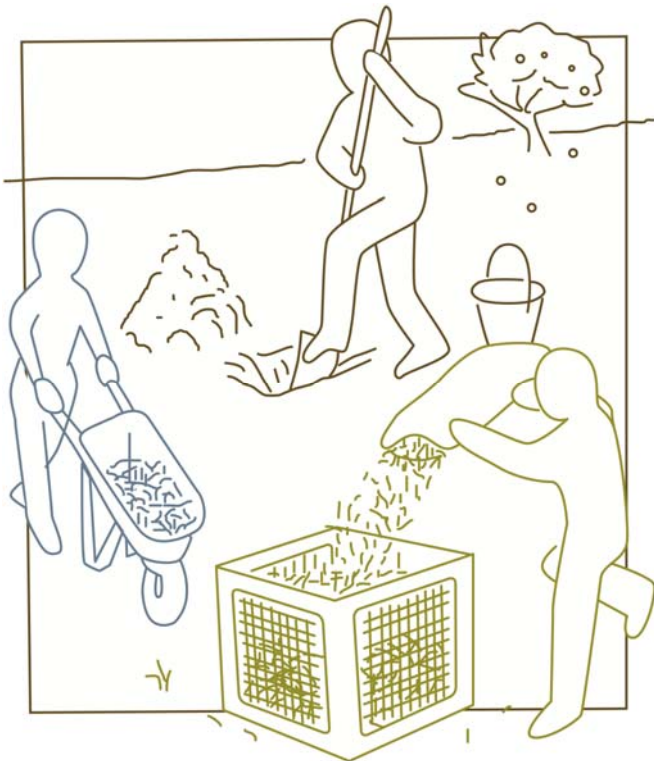


MASTER **composter** soil BUILDER



Compost & Reuse Yard & Food Wastes!



What Is Compost?

Compost is a dark, crumbly substance that looks and smells like soil in the forest. It's made from things that were once living but have broken down over time. Some examples of these once living, or "organic," ingredients include scraps from your kitchen and trimmings from your yard and garden.

Why Should I Make Compost?

These organic ingredients improve your soil. Healthy soils grow beautiful, strong plants. Healthy soils also provide us with clean water and air, and reduce global warming. Making and using compost is a great way you can help the environment!

Composting also saves you money. Composting yard trimmings or kitchen waste may reduce your garbage bill. Healthy, compost-rich soil also reduces the need for fertilizer and saves water.

“Making and using compost is a great way that you can help the environment!”



What Kinds Of Things Can I Compost?

Anything that was once alive can be composted, including grass clippings, leaves, flowers, old plants, and twigs. Items you can compost from the kitchen include vegetable and fruit scraps, breads and grains (rice, noodles, etc.), and coffee grounds.

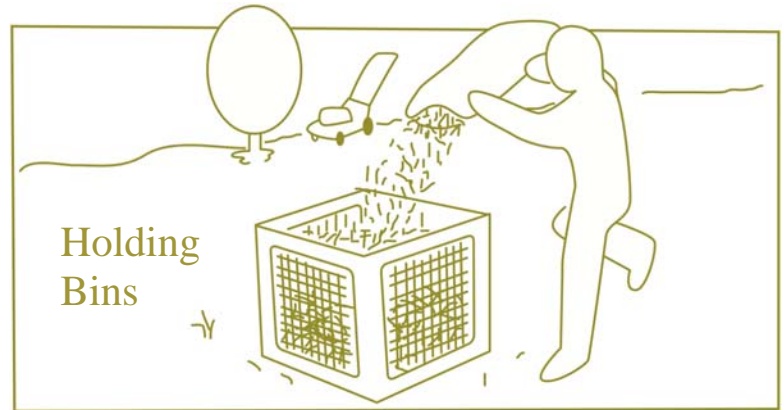
To avoid problems with rats, it is better to put meat or fish parts, dairy products and oily foods in the Food & Yard Waste collection cart. Invasive weeds and diseased plants should also go in the Yard Waste collection cart – home compost piles don't get hot enough to control them.

Be sure to keep trash and non-organic items out of your compost pile, such as rocks, pieces of metal, glass or plastic, or fruit stickers.



How Can I Make Compost?

There are a number of ways to make compost. Each method has its own advantages and challenges. Find a system that works for you, so you can do your part to help our environment and make your soil healthier.



In My Backyard or in the Home?

Garden Waste:

- Begin by mixing roughly equal volumes of garden wastes that are green-colored (like grass clippings) with items that are brown-colored (dead leaves or plants).
- To speed the composting process, chop up materials before or after mixing. You can use pruning shears, a machete or sharp shovel, run a lawnmower over the mixture, or put the mixture in a metal trash container and shred it with a weed-whacker. The smaller the materials, the more quickly they will compost.
- Add water to the mixture. The mixture should be as moist as a wrung out sponge when squeezed. Go ahead, take a handful and try!
- You can pile the materials in a compost bin if you'd like, but it's not necessary. Mostly compost bins just help keep the pile tidy and, if they are plastic, hold some moisture.
- Once a week mix the materials up again. This is called "turning" the pile. Add water as needed to keep the pile moist. The compost pile needs air and water, and turning helps the decomposition process.
- After completing all of these steps, you'll have finished compost in as little as 8 weeks.

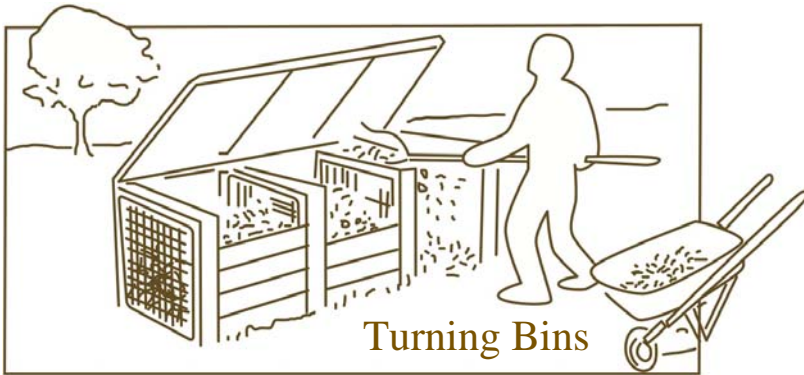
Don't want to go through all the work of mixing and chopping? That's OK! You can still make compost simply by piling up organic materials, keeping them moist, and letting them break down over time. The process takes a lot longer (one year minimum), but all organic materials break down into compost eventually.

Kitchen Waste:

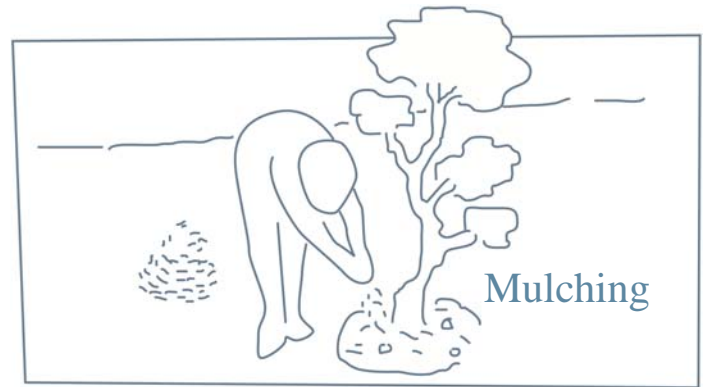
Kitchen waste should be composted separately from garden waste. Rats and other urban pests love food wastes! So we need to compost them in a more secure system.

- **Burying** plant-based **kitchen waste** at least 8 inches beneath the soil surface is one way to compost kitchen waste. This process takes at least 6 months and requires you to keep track of where you are burying food each time. Burying in a new space each time is essential! This is a great way to recycle organic materials and build healthy garden soil. To avoid rats, it is important that no food is left unburied.
- Another strategy is to construct a homemade **food waste "digester."** Simply drill holes in the bottom and sides (but not above the soil level) of a steel garbage can, and bury the can half-way in the ground in well draining soil. Put your plant-based kitchen wastes into the digester each week. Insects, worms, and other soil organisms will reach the food through the holes and break it down over time, leaving rich compost behind for you to use 8-12 months later. You must keep the lid on the digester to keep rats and other animals away!
- Another popular approach to composting your kitchen waste is to use a **worm bin**. You'll need "red wiggler" worms (which are different than the worms normally found in your garden) and a secure, but not airtight, container. Add the worms and damp bedding material (shredded paper or fall leaves work great) to get the bin ready, then bury a small amount of kitchen waste under the bedding. Give the worms a new serving of kitchen waste each week, and over time, watch as all the kitchen waste and bedding disappear into rich compost. Worm bins require more work, but the compost is top quality and the process is a lot of fun.

Call the Garden Hotline for plans and more information on safe food waste composting.



Turning Bins



Mulching

In My Community Garden?

If you garden in a P-Patch or other community garden, you definitely have a need for compost, but figuring out a system that will work for everyone can be more difficult. Here are some strategies for composting in your community garden:

- Appoint a "Compost Lead" - someone who is responsible for making sure the compost gets made.
- Designate a "Compost Crew" - a workforce to help the Compost Lead make the compost. There can be multiple crews!
- Decide on clear roles and tasks for the "Lead" and "Crew." These can include talking to other gardeners and encouraging them to compost, scheduling times to work on the compost, creating and putting up educational signs for gardeners, collecting materials for composting, and more.
- Put up educational signs with images of what should (or should not!) be composted. Use languages spoken by the gardeners.
- Inspire your compost crew! Host a potluck for composting work parties, or make a prize available to the compost crew that makes the fastest pile.
- Leave 1-2 plots unplanted each year and encourage the gardeners to bury their organic wastes in them. Be sure to refer to the "What Kinds of Things Can I Compost" section before burying!
- Use other composting practices described in the "How Else Can I Use Yard & Food Wastes" section. These can be easier and more effective for your fellow gardeners.
- Put a food digester or worm bin in your plot! It can inspire other gardeners to compost their food waste.

In My Apartment?

If you live in a space that doesn't have a yard that needs compost (or even space to make it), but you want to compost, you have options!

- In Seattle, all apartments and condos are required to provide food waste collection for residents by the end of 2011. This food waste is collected separately from garbage and recycling, and taken to Cedar Grove Composting to be made into compost. Put your kitchen waste in your food scrap container and help Seattle make more compost for its gardens!
- You can also keep a worm bin indoors. Under the kitchen sink or in a garage is a great space for a worm bin. Use the finished compost on your houseplants, or give it away as a present to a gardening family member or friend! If you have plenty of worms and bedding in the bin, and aren't adding too much kitchen waste, there won't be any bad smells coming from your worm bin.

How Can I Use Compost?

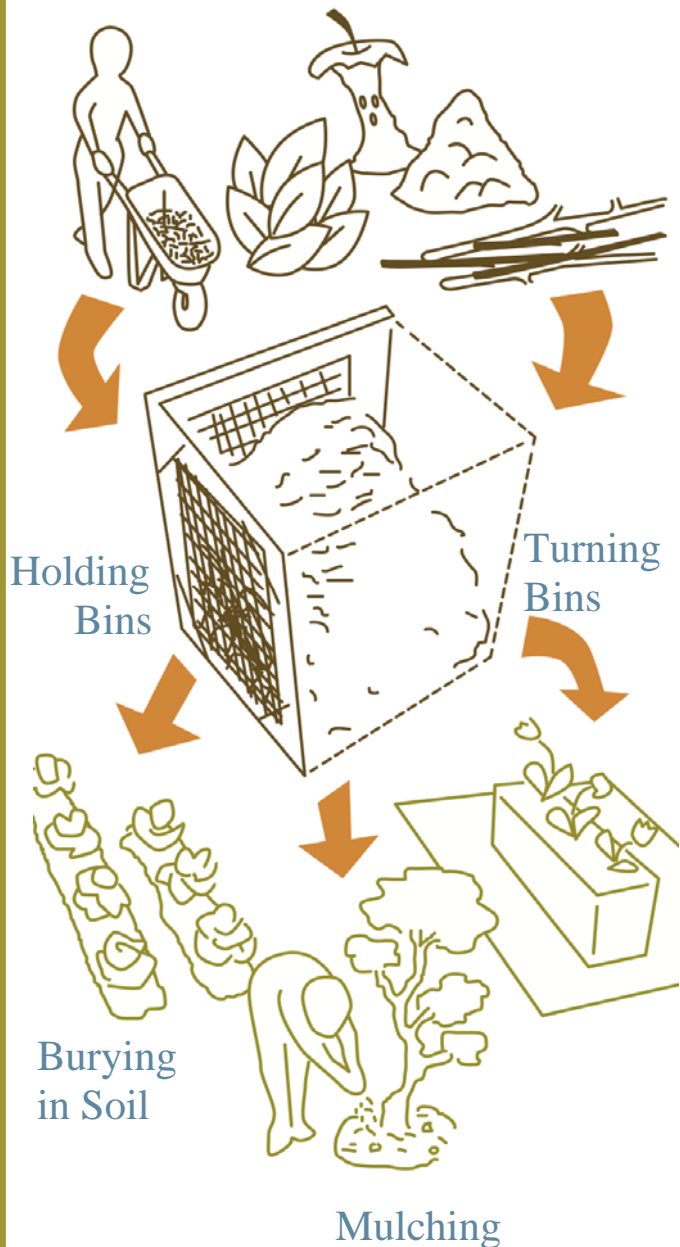
Your compost is finished when you can't recognize the food or garden waste, and the remaining material looks like dark, healthy garden soil.

Digging compost into your soil will improve it. Your soil will hold water better and drain more freely, retain important nutrients, be easier to cultivate, and help protect your plants against pests and diseases. Dig in 1-2 inches of compost to start new beds, and add more each year.

You can also leave compost on top of your soil as "mulch". A mulch made from compost will prevent weeds, conserve water, and slowly release nutrients to your plants. 1-2 inches is a good thickness for compost mulch.

**"Dig it in,
or leave it
on top!"**

There are many ways to reuse yard & food wastes to help the environment, and part of the fun is figuring out a way that works for you.



Burying in Soil



How Else Can I Use Yard & Food Wastes In My Garden?

Composting organic wastes using the methods described in this guide can be a lot of work. If you want less work, you can still help the environment by recycling organic wastes and building healthy soil to grow healthy plants with these methods:

- **Burial.** Just like your kitchen waste, you can bury soft, green garden waste to build your soil. Bury it 8 inches deep and in a new location each time.
- **Mulching.** Also known as “chop and drop,” you can leave garden wastes on top of your soil as mulch. It will provide the same benefits as compost mulch. Don't do this with vegetables or any food that might attract rodents.
- **“Grasscycling”** – leave grass clippings on the lawn, or use the clippings as mulch in garden beds.

Thanks for your interest in reusing yard & food wastes, building a healthier Seattle, and doing your part for the planet! **To learn more** about composting or anything covered in this brochure, use these resources:

The Garden Hotline:

206-633-0224, email help@gardenhotline.org
www.gardenhotline.org

Seattle Public Utilities:

206-684-3000, www.seattle.gov/util

Seattle Tilth:

www.seattletilth.org

P-Patch Program:

www.seattle.gov/neighborhoods/ppatch

The Master Composter Soil Builder Program is sponsored by Seattle Public Utilities and managed by Seattle Tilth.

English version, revised 7/2012