Why Compost?

Environment

Backyard composting is a simple, effective way to keep food waste out of landfills. Managing food and yard wastes onsite reduces personal environmental impacts and creates a rich soil amendment for gardens.

Cost Savings

Diverting organic waste from the landfill reduces cost and frequency of curbside waste collection. Backyard composting, especially when combined with curbside organic pick-up, will save you money and protect natural resources.

Rewarding Outcome

Composting allows you to witness the soil nutrient cycle from your own home. Simply let a pile passively decompose, or challenge yourself to actively reach high temperatures. Regardless of method, composting is fun and adaptable to your household needs:

- Small kitchen worm bin
- Actively managed hot pile
- Passive cold compost pile
- Curbside compost pick-up

Did you know?

Studies indicate that on any given month, a household generates between 20 to 80 pounds of organic waste. Community-wide, we could divert *tons* of waste from the landfill by composting!

Source: Institute for Local Self-Reliance

Contact Information
WSU Master Composter/Recyclers

The Master Composter/Recycler Program provides composting, recycling, and waste reduction education to Whatcom County residents.

Web: whatcom.wsu.edu/ch/compost.html
Email: mcr.whatcom@wsu.edu
Call: (360) 778-5814
Visit: 1000 N. Forest St, Suite 201
Bellingham, WA 98225

facebook.com/WhatcomMCR
Follow for the latest events and info.

Compost Demonstration Site

Hovander Homestead Park
5299 Nielsen Ave, Ferndale, WA 98248
Open Daily, 8AM - 8:30PM

Whatcom County
Washington State University Extension

Information provided by Washington State University Whatcom County Extension, Master Composter/Recycler (MCR) Program. The MCR Program is funded in part by Whatcom County Solid Waste.

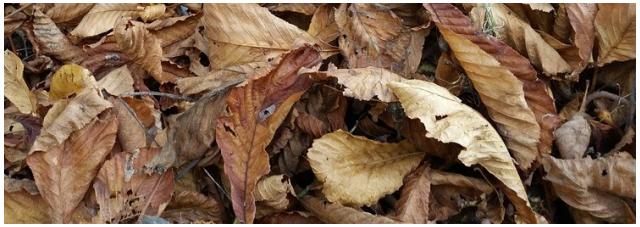
WSU Factsheet Referenced:

Backyard Composting - EB1784E

Visit **pubs.wsu.edu** to access this and other free WSU peer-reviewed publications.

WSU WHATCOM MASTER COMPOSTER · RECYCLER

Backyard Composting



Quick-start guide to transform organic wastes into a rich soil amendment for your garden.

Whatcom County
Washington State University Extension

Composting harnesses the natural process of decomposition to convert organic matter into rich soil amendment.

Getting started

Active or Passive Pile? Ask yourself...

- Do you need to generate compost **within 2 months**?
- Do you have at least **one cubic yard** of composting material and backyard space?
- Will you **turn** (mix) the compost pile at least once a week?

If you answered ***yes*** to most of these questions, consider building an *actively managed hot pile*. If not, *cold composting* and other passive methods are right for you.

Keys to success

Moisture level of the pile should always feel damp. Water it lightly in summer and cover in winter to protect from rain.

Turn the pile regularly to provide aeration and prevent odors.

Chop particles before adding to the pile to speed decomposition.

Pile size of at least one cubic yard prevents the pile from drying out too quickly.

Timing is important. Gather leaves in the fall to compost early in spring as outdoor temperatures increase.

Temperature matters!

Creating pile conditions that increase and maintain temperatures between 130°F-150°F reduce pathogens and weed seeds.

Composting Materials

Mix, match, and use what you have

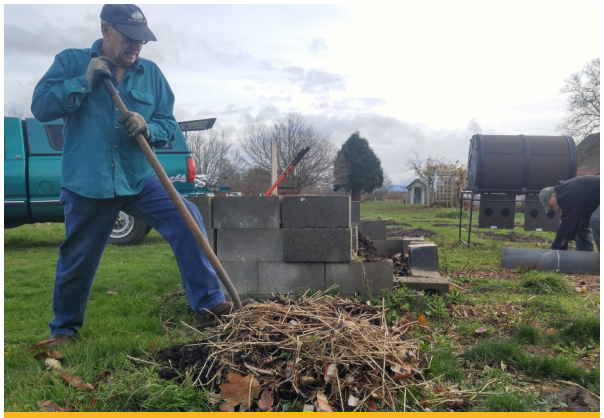
Your composting ingredients and the ratio of "greens" to "browns" affect the rate of decomposition and quality of the finished compost. When building your pile, keep in mind that **piles need more bulking agents to keep the ideal moisture content and aeration.**

NITROGEN Energy Materials "Greens"	✓ Food scraps and peels ✓ Grass clippings ✓ Coffee grounds ✓ Green plant cuttings ✓ Annual weeds ✓ Dairy, chicken, or rabbit manure *
CARBON Bulking Agents "Browns"	✓ Fall leaves ✓ Sawdust ✓ Wood chips ✓ Chopped woody prunings ✓ Hay and straw
LEAVE OUT	✗ Meats, dairy, or fats ✗ Pet and human feces ✗ Diseased or noxious plants ** ✗ Seed heads**

* Adding animal manure to a compost pile is not recommended unless it will be managed to sustain high temperatures (130°F-150°F) and/or the pile will rest for a minimum of one year prior to vegetable garden application, reducing the risk of disease by allowing time for pathogen die-off. **Please refer to the publication Backyard Composting - EB1784E for more about compost safety.**

** Leave out unless the compost pile is active and sustains temperatures between 130°F to 150°F.

Finished compost will look and feel like dark, crumbly soil and have a pleasant earthy scent.



Methods & Tools

Pile, Bin, or Tumbler?

Open piles are composting materials simply heaped and mixed together. works well for slow composting.

Tumblers aerate the pile with less manual effort and work well for smaller volumes.

Cylindrical or cubic bins keep the pile contained, aiding in increased temperatures for fast composting.

Other basic tools:

- Pitchfork
- Garden cutting tool and chopping block
- Tarp
- Compost thermometer

Troubleshooting

Pests: Rodents and other small mammals are attracted to strong odors. Bury food scraps deep in pile and avoid adding cooked foods.

Odor: Pile may be too wet, leading to anaerobic conditions. Try turning pile and adding bulking agents.

Stalled temperatures: Pile may be too small, improperly mixed, or compacted.

Contact WSU for help if problems persist:
mcr.whatcom@wsu.edu