

Home Composting Guide

nature's way of recycling



Why Compost?

More than ¼ of our household waste is yard clippings and kitchen scraps. Composting is a way of recycling yard waste and other organic materials through decomposition.

Benefits of Composting:

- Reduce excess nutrients in waterways.
- Helps prevent runoff and soil erosion.
- Remove solids, oil, grease, and heavy metals from stormwater runoff.
- Promote higher yields of crops.
- Remediate soils contaminated by hazardous waste.
- Reduces or eliminate the need for water, fertilizers, and pesticides.
- Extends municipal landfill life by diverting organic materials.

GET STARTED TODAY!

The Compost Site:

- Material can be composted in a pile, in constructed bins, or in commercial composting containers.
- The ideal size for a composting bin is one cubic yard (3'x3'x3').
- Multiple bins or piles are recommended for different stages of the process.
- The compost pile/bin should be in a well-drained area out of direct sunlight.

Composting Conditions:

The composting process is a biological one that compares to the raising of plants. The rate of composting, like the rate of plant growth, can be affected by many factors.

A good compost pile requires a balance between:

- **Nutrients:** Carbon (browns) and Nitrogen (greens), 25 –30 parts carbon to 1 part nitrogen
- **Air:** good supply of oxygen for organisms to breathe
- **Moisture:** pile should be similar to a damp sponge
- **Temperature:** pile can range from 59 degrees to 158 degrees F.

Compost is generally ready to use when it looks like humus (after several months). However, aging for another 1 to 2 months is highly recommended.

Water Quality Goals:

Defiance, OH is in the Maumee River Watershed, within the Western Lake Erie Basin (WLEB). One primary cause of impaired water quality in Lake Erie and the WLEB is excess nutrients.

Stormwater runoff from urban and suburban areas carry excess nutrients into local waterways from lawn care fertilizers, and organic matter such as grass clippings, brush, tree limbs and leaves. Composting these materials and utilizing finished compost as fertilizer keeps nutrients in the garden and out of waterways.



**“WASTE IS A VERB,
NOT A NOUN.”**
—Karl Hammer, Vermont Compost Co.



For more information, contact:
City of Defiance, MS4 Coordinator
419.783.4355



Additional information and links available at:

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Items to Compost:

Browns = High Carbon

- Ashes, wood
- Bark
- Cardboard, shredded
- Corn stalks
- Fruit waste
- Leaves
- Newspaper, shredded
- Peat moss
- Pine needles
- Sawdust
- Stems and twigs, shredded
- Straw
- Vegetable stalks

Greens = High Nitrogen

- Alfalfa
- Clover
- Coffee grounds
- Food waste
- Garden waste
- Grass clippings
- Hay
- Hedge clippings
- Hops, used
- Manures
- Seaweed
- Vegetable scraps
- Weeds*

Items to Avoid:

- Meat
- Bones
- Fish
- Fats
- Dairy
- Synthetic Chemicals
- Diseased Plants
- Pet Waste
- Coal Ash
- Colored Paper

*Avoid weeds that have gone to seed, as seeds may survive all but the hottest compost piles.

Composting Methods:

Compost decomposes fastest between 120 and 160 degrees Fahrenheit, so anything that will increase the heat will "cook" your compost faster. Here are four tips for fast composting:

- 1.) Chop and shred larger items, which makes it easier for the bacteria to break them down. For example, one easy way to slice and dice garden waste is to run your lawn mower over leaves and other garden waste.
- 2.) Turn, turn, turn.
- 3.) Give your compost heap a "big meal" versus small snacks. Collect all your organic waste over a couple of days and then add it in one big bunch. The more you add at one time, the more your compost will heat up.
- 4.) Keep your compost pile in the sun. The heat will speed up the process.

Compost Activators:

A compost activator contributes either high nitrogen, microorganisms, or both, and provides a quick boost to the decomposition process. You can also "jump start" compost by adding aged manure, alfalfa meal, or blood meal to your pile.

Troubleshooting:

Rotten Odor:

- too much moisture = turn pile, add dry, porous materials. (shredded paper)

Ammonia Odor:

- too much nitrogen (greens) = add carbon (browns) like leaves, straw, sawdust.

Low Pile Temperature:

- Pile too small = make larger
- Insufficient moisture = add water
- Poor aeration = turn pile
- Lack of nitrogen = add (greens) grass clippings, manure.