

Urban Composting Guide

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Euclid Avenue United Methodist Church

<http://www.euclidumc.org/>

What is compost?

Compost is organic material that can be used as a soil amendment or as a medium to grow plants. Mature compost is a stable material with a content called humus that is dark brown or black and has a soil-like, earthy smell. It is created by combining organic wastes (e.g., yard trimmings, food wastes) in proper ratios into piles, rows, or vessels.

Why bother composting?

Yard trimmings and food residuals together constitute about **24-40 percent** of the U.S. municipal solid waste stream. Composting keeps these out of landfills. Composting is also

- * easy
- * a way to provide nutrients to your soil without using commercial fertilizers
- * either expensive or cheap, fancy or plain, labor intensive or lazy intensive, depending on your preference
- * interesting and fun for adults and children

How do I compost?

Composting is a very basic process. You can simply toss grass clippings and leaves [and kitchen scraps] in a heap and let nature do the rest in its own good time... or you can help it along by creating the conditions that allow compost to form. Just like us, the decomposer organisms that create compost have three basic requirements: **air, water, and food.**

To compost, you'll need

- * a place for the organic material to decompose: a bin or container, or a place outdoors to pile material
- * a way to allow **air** to penetrate the pile: digging, turning, rolling, depending on your pile
- * **water**: pile should be as moist as a wrung out sponge
- * **food**: compost needs to be about half "brown" and half "green" by weight. Also mix in some outdoor soil, finished compost, or compost starter (available for purchase from gardening stores) to introduce the decomposer organisms to your pile.

Possible Materials To Use

Green/"Moist"

- * Coffee grounds
- * Eggshells
- * Feathers
- * Flowers
- * Fruit and fruit peels
- * Grass clippings (fresh)
- * Hair
- * Tea Leaves
- * Vegetables and peelings
- * Weeds that have not gone to seed

Brown/"Dry"

- * Coffee filters
- * Grass clippings (dried)
- * Hay
- * Leaves (dead)
- * Paper
- * Peat moss
- * Pine needles
- * Sawdust
- * Straw
- * Tea bags
- * Wood chips
- * Wood ash

Materials To Avoid

- * pet wastes can contain harmful bacteria;
- * meat, fish, fats and dairy products are likely to smell as they rot and may attract four-footed visitors;
- * insect-infested or diseased plants may persist in the compost;
- * materials contaminated by synthetic chemicals or treated with herbicides or insecticides should never be used;
- * weeds with mature seeds and plants with a persistent root system (like crabgrass, ground ivy, or daylilies) may not be killed by the heat of the compost;
- * leaves of rhubarb and walnut contain substances toxic to insects or other plants .

Most of the information in this handout was quoted verbatim from the following sources: The US Environmental Protection Agency (<http://www.epa.gov/compost/>) and the online book, Backyard Magic: The Composting Handbook (<http://www.gnb.ca/0009/0372/0003/0001-e.asp>).