Basic BACKYARD COMPOSTING

Turn your garbage into gold!
It’s easy, it’s smart, it’s recycling.

RESOURCES
MORE COMPOSTING BROCHURES
- Worm Composting
- Compost bins – Sources & Designs

COMPOST EDUCATION CENTER
Stop by the Garden for the Environment (GFE) at 7th Avenue and Lawton Street. The center features many different styles of compost bins and instructional signage. Open all daylight hours. Volunteer hours every Wed. from 10 am – 2 pm and Sat. from 10 am – 4pm.

FREE WORKSHOPS
Sign up for one of our free monthly composting workshops. Call the GFE at 415-731-5627 or become a member of our listserv by e-mailing info@gardenfortheenvironment.org

BOOKS

MORE INFORMATION
The Rotline (415) 731-5627
Garden for the Environment
Office: 451 Hayes Street, SF Ca 94102
(415) 731-5627
Garden: 7th Avenue @ Lawton Street, SF Ca 94122
www.gardenfortheenvironment.org
San Francisco Department of the Environment
11 Grove St., San Francisco, CA 94121
(415) 355-3700
www.sfenvironment.com

Garden for the Environment is sponsored by the San Francisco Department of the Environment.

WHAT IS COMPOSTING?
Composting is nature’s way of recycling. It is a satisfying way to turn your fruit, vegetable and yard trimmings into a dark, crumbly, sweet-smelling soil conditioner.

WHY COMPOST?
- Saves you money by lowering garbage bills and replacing store-bought soil conditioners.
- Helps garden and house plants by improving the fertility and health of your soil.
- Decreases need for chemical fertilizers and pesticides.
- Saves water by helping the soil hold moisture and reducing water runoff.
- Promotes better air quality, by supporting ideal growing conditions for plants thus providing more greenspace, less carbon and a reduction in greenhouse gases.
- Benefits the environment by recycling valuable organic resources and extending the life of our landfill.

THE 4 “R’S” OF THE YARD
- Reduce the amount of yard trimmings you make by planting slow-growing, drought-tolerant plants.
- Reuse yard trimmings by grasscycling (mowing before lawn gets too long, and leaving the clippings on the lawn) and by mulching fallen leaves and chipped prunings (spread them 6 inches deep on paths and around trees and shrubs).
- Recycle remaining yard trimmings by composting. This brochure shows you how.
- Restore the environment with thriving gardens. It all starts at home.
**CHOOSE A SYSTEM**

**SYSTEMS FOR FOOD AND YARD TRIMMINGS**

**RODENT RESISTANT BINS**
- For fruit, vegetable & yard trimmings using “Mixed” compost recipe
- For yard trimmings alone (using “No-fuss” recipe)
- Bins require a lid, floor, & no holes bigger than 1/4 inch

**OPEN PILES AND SIMPLE BINS**
- For yard trimmings ONLY (are not rodent resistant)
- Requires “Active” composting (chopping & weekly turning to keep animals out)
- Usually inexpensive or free

**SYSTEMS FOR JUST FOOD TRIMMINGS**

For more information about the following, see the WormComposting brochure.

**Worm bins**
- Takes some time and effort
- For indoors and outdoors
- Produces excellent fertilizer
- Most fun, especially for kids

**Closed-air systems**
- Low maintenance
- Prone to odor & insect problems

**Underground composting**
- Requires digging a hole each time you add new materials
- No harvesting necessary

**Remember…**
Whenever you compost fruit & vegetable trimmings, the Health Department requires a rodent-resistant system. Use a container with a lid, a floor, and holes no bigger than 1/4 inch, or bury food scraps at least one foot under the soil surface. For more information about bins, see the Compost Bins–Sources & Designs brochure.

**FOLLOW THE BASICS**

Thanks to friendly bugs and worms, composting is as easy as “1-2-3” – no matter which recipe you use!

1. **CHOP** materials so there’s more surface area for microorganisms to chew on.
2. **MIX** “browns” (dry, woody materials) with “greens” (moist, green materials).
3. **MAINTAIN** air & water balance by keeping compost as moist as a wrung-out sponge.

**Browns, Greens, Air & Water** are the “big four” that will keep every compost pile happy.

**DO COMPOST:**
- Untreated sawdusts
- Chopped, woody prunings
- Straw
- Fallen leaves (minimal eucalyptus)
- Tea bags
- Citrus rinds
- Coffee grounds & filters
- Lawn clippings & young weeds
- Fruit & vegetable trimmings
- Herbivore manures, bedding

**DON’T COMPOST:**
- Meat, bones or fish
- Dairy products or grease
- Grains, beans or breads
- Dog, cat or bird feces
- Sawdust from ply-wood/treated wood
- Diseased plants (in cold piles)
- Weed seeds (in cold piles)
- Fruit & vegetable trimmings (in open piles/simple bins)

**RODENT-RESISTANT BINS**

**MAKE YOUR OWN FROM THE RECIPES BELOW**

**COLD OR PASSIVE COMPOST**
For yard trimmings ONLY. Requires a rodent-resistant bin to prevent possible animal nesting.

- **INGREDIENTS:**
  - Yard trimmings only (browns & greens), water as needed

- **DIRECTIONS:**
  - Feed chopped or unchopped yard trimmings into bin as you generate them. Maintain compost by keeping it as moist as a wrung-out sponge. Harvest rich, brown, finished compost from the bottom and center of the pile after 12-18 months.

**HOT OR ACTIVE COMPOST**
For fruit, vegetable & yard trimmings together. This recipe requires a rodent-resistant bin and active maintenance to prevent animal nesting and feeding.

- **INGREDIENTS:**
  - A cubic yard minimum of fruit, vegetable and yard trimmings (browns & greens), water as needed.

- **DIRECTIONS:**
  - Feed yard trimmings to your pile as you generate them by chopping them first into pieces 6 inches or smaller. Food scraps need to be buried and mixed into the center of the pile. Never dump and run! Be sure to mix in enough browns to balance your greens. Feed as often as you like. Maintain compost by turning or mixing it about once a week. Keep it moist as a wrung-out sponge. Harvest rich, brown, finished compost by sifting out coarse, unfinished materials after 3-9 months.

**HOT COMPOST**

Hot compost happens when you follow the basic “1-2-3” carefully, and the pile is about a cubic yard (3’x3’x3’). Create a balanced diet for the microorganisms in the pile by mixing an equal amount of browns (or carbohydrates for an energy source) and greens (or nitrogen for building block). The more rapidly the beneficial microbes (mostly fungus and bacteria) digest organic materials, the warmer the pile becomes. Heat accelerates composting. When temperatures reach 130 F for three or more days, most of the pathogens and weed seeds are killed. Cold, slow composting will still result in rich compost, but may still carry active weed seeds and plant diseases. If your pile is large enough, moist enough, and well chopped, but not heating up, (and you want it to) turn it and mix in some greens like grass clippings. For faster hot composting and better weed-seed kill, turn or mix your hot pile about once a week.

**TROUBLESHOOTING**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SYMPTOMS</th>
<th>PROBLEMS</th>
<th>SOLUTIONS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pile not composting</td>
<td>Too dry</td>
<td>Add water until slightly damp &amp; turn (mix)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pile smells rotten/earthy</td>
<td>Too much brown matter</td>
<td>Add fresh green matter or organic nitrogen fertilizer &amp; turn</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pile scalds</td>
<td>Too wet/too many food scraps or lawn clippings</td>
<td>Turn &amp; add browns (dry, woody materials) or dry soil</td>
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<tr>
<td>Food scraps exposed</td>
<td></td>
<td>Bury &amp; mix food scraps into pile</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-compostables</td>
<td></td>
<td>Remove meat, dairy, grease, etc. &amp; turn</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rodents in pile</td>
<td>Food scraps in open bins/lids larger than 1/4 inch/ non-compostables</td>
<td>Use traps or baits, rodent-proof bins, remove meat, dairy, grease, etc. &amp; turn</td>
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