Did you ever wish for a beneficial way to use kitchen waste or leaves and grass clippings instead of sending them to the landfill? There is something you can do. Try composting in your own backyard. Composting creates a nutrient-rich fertilizer that also helps condition the soil.

Composting is the controlled decay of organic material such as grass clippings, leaves, wood shavings, cardboard and paper. A compost pile shouldn’t be a stinking heap – in fact if you are composting correctly there will be little odor.

Using the right compost ingredients will keep your yard tidy and help you avoid attracting undesirable critters. Kitchen scraps may be composted but should be limited to fruit and vegetable matter and coffee grounds. Meat products, grease or eggs should not be used. Also, don’t compost dog and cat waste and cat litter; they can produce bacteria harmful to humans.

Composting is a simple way to manage yard waste on your property.

* In Fort Wayne landscape debris makes up 13.5% of all residential garbage going to the landfill. That’s over 12,000 tons of grass clippings, leaves and other potentially beneficial material.
* City residents pay nearly $300,000 per year to throw away landscape debris. By composting more and keeping this material from going to the landfill, City residents can lower the tipping fees paid to the landfill. That could impact what you pay for garbage collection.
* Indiana law bans leaves from going to landfills. Leaves picked-up by the City in the fall are composted and mixed with treated sewage sludge to make biosolids – a soil amendment and fertilizer that is sold to farmers and given away free to City residents.

Doesn’t it make SENSE and more CENTS help your lawn and garden grow by using something you might otherwise pay to throw away?

Before you begin creating compost, there are a few steps to take to avoid any problems. First, make sure composting is permitted by your neighborhood covenants. Next, select a location and decide how you will contain the material. A compost pile can be started on bare ground, but it is a good idea to begin with a base of straw under it. You can also use a commercially-available bin or build a simple, three-sided containment area.

As a general rule of thumb, begin by mixing one part “green” material such as fresh grass clippings with three parts “brown” matter such as dry leaves. There are two approaches to composting:

**Cool and Easy:** Adding material gradually to a bin or pile and allowing them to degrade naturally with little maintenance. Using this approach, compost will be ready to use in six months to two years.

**Hot and Fast:** Building and actively mixing a pile to produce disease-killing temperatures. This method can yield finished compost in three to four months.

**Keep it Clean and Tidy:** Whichever composting method you use, remember the compost must not attract rodents or create a nuisance. One of the local enforcement agencies such as the Fort Wayne-Allen County Department of Health or Neighborhood Code Enforcement can order you to clean-up, modify (for example, use a compost bin instead of having an open pile), move or even eliminate your compost if it is creating a health or sanitation issue.

Many sources of information on composting are available on-line, from garden centers, plant nurseries, the library and from the Purdue Extension Service.