

# Backyard Composting

Information from the City of Fort Wayne, the Fort Wayne-AlLEN County Department of Health, and the Allen County Solid Waste Management District



## What to Compost

- ✓ Yard waste such as leaves, grass clippings and wood shavings
- ✓ Kitchen waste including coffee grounds, fruit and vegetable matter
- ✓ Shredded cardboard, paper
- ✓ Horse, cow, pig manure



## What NOT to Compost

- ✗ Large twigs or limbs
- ✗ Meat products, kitchen grease, eggs
- ✗ Dog and cat waste

## What Is Composting?

Composting is the controlled decay of organic material such as grass clippings, leaves, wood shavings, cardboard and paper.

Kitchen scraps may be composted but should be limited to fruit and vegetable matter and coffee grounds, and should not include meat products, grease or eggs. Dog and cat waste and cat litter should not be composted because they can produce bacteria that is harmful to humans.

Composting creates a nutrient-rich fertilizer that also helps condition the soil.

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

- In Fort Wayne landscape debris makes up 13.4% of

all residential garbage going to the landfill. That's nearly 12,000 tons of grass clippings, leaves and other potentially beneficial material.

- City residents pay around \$300,000 per year to throw away landscape debris. The more materials you compost, the more it could impact what you pay for garbage collection.
- Leaves are banned from going to landfills and are instead composted when picked up by the City.

Doesn't it make SENSE and more CENTS to use something you might dispose of to help your lawn and garden grow?

## Getting Started

Before you begin, make sure composting is permitted by your neighborhood association covenants.

As a general rule of thumb, begin by mixing one part "green" material such as fresh grass clippings to three parts "brown" matter such as dry leaves. A compost pile can be started on bare ground as long as there is a straw base under it. You can also use a commercially-available bin or build a containment area.

There are two approaches to composting:

**Cool and Easy:** Adding materials 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



ALLEN COUNTY SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT DISTRICT  
[www.acwastewatcher.org](http://www.acwastewatcher.org)



COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT  
Neighborhood Code



## Resources

[www.acwastewatcher.org](http://www.acwastewatcher.org)

[www.epa.gov/recycle/composting-home](http://www.epa.gov/recycle/composting-home)

[eartheasy.com/grow\\_compost.html](http://eartheasy.com/grow_compost.html)

[purelivingforlife.com/composting-101/](http://purelivingforlife.com/composting-101/)

<http://howtocompost.org/>

<http://mastercomposter.com/compost.html>

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 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.



## When Is Compost Ready?

Using compost before it is ready can damage plants. Undecayed “brown” material in the compost can temporarily reduce the plant-available nitrogen in the soil. Undecayed “green” matter can harbor pests and disease. Immature compost can also introduce weed seeds and root-damaging acids.

- it smells earthy – not sour, putrid or like ammonia
- it no longer heats up after it is turned over or wetted
- it has a crumbly texture and looks like dark soil

rated into the soil before an area is planted. Loosen the existing soil then work the compost in to a depth of six inches to a foot before planting.

Compost can also be used in place of mulch around landscape plants.

### Learn More

For more information about landscaping practices that can save money and help the environment, please visit:

[cityoffortwayne.org](http://cityoffortwayne.org)

or call

311 or 260-427-8311

### No Backyard?

Drop off compostable materials at a Fort Wayne/Allen County community composting facility:

City Utilities' Bio-Solids, Lime & Yard Waste Recycling Site  
6202 Lake Avenue  
260-427-5535

## Benefits of Using Compost

### Soil Structure

Incorporating compost into the soil makes it easier to work, plant and cultivate.

Compost helps sandy soil retain water and adds nutrients that would normally wash right through sand.

Compost alters the texture and structure of all soil types, making it less likely to erode.

### Nutrients

Compost contains micro-nutrients such as iron and manganese that are often absent in synthetic fertilizers.

Compost releases its nutrients slowly, over sever-

al months or years.

Soil enriched with compost retains nutrients from fertilizer better than lifeless soil does. When nutrients are held more strongly in the soil they are less likely to be carried away by stormwater runoff.

Compost also helps balance both acid and alkaline soils, bringing pH levels into the optimum range for nutrient availability.

### Beneficial Soil Life

The good bacteria in compost help to break down mulch and plant debris into plant-available nutrients. Some of the bacteria also convert nitrogen from the air into a nutrient plants can use.

Beneficial insects, worms and other organisms are plentiful in compost-enriched soil. As they burrow through the soil they help keep it loose and well aerated.

Compost helps suppress diseases and harmful pests that can overrun poor, lifeless soil.



## Composting and Water Quality

Composting promotes healthy root growth, allowing more rainwater to soak into the ground and decreasing runoff.

Compost breaks up tightly bound particles in clay or silty soil, allowing plant roots to spread, water to drain and air to penetrate.

Compost particles attract and hold nutrients strongly

enough to prevent them from washing away thus reducing excess nutrients that may cause algae to grow in waterways.

By adding nutrients to the soil, compost can reduce or eliminate the need to use synthetic fertilizer.

Compost also reduces the need to use chemical pesticides because it

contains beneficial micro-organisms that can protect plants from disease and pests.

Because compost helps soil absorb and retain moisture it reduces the need for supplemental watering, saving you money and allowing you to conserve water.