



CHARTER TOWNSHIP OF PLYMOUTH

FACT SHEET

GUIDE NO. 14
BACKYARD COMPOSTING



Compost benefits your garden, your pocketbook and the environment

WHY COMPOST?

Compost benefits the garden in many ways. You can either leave the compost on the soil surface as a mulch or work it into the soil. As mulch, it can be spread on top of the soil where it can eliminate weeds and retain moisture or it can be dug into the soil as an amendment where it will improve

soil structure for better absorption and retention of nutrients and water.

Applying compost once or twice a year will ensure a beautiful garden and earthworms will love it. The more applications of compost, the better.

HOW TO COMPOST

A backyard compost pile is made by mixing green, high-nitrogen material and brown, high-carbon material together with soil and water. Chopping or shredding the materials with a lawn mower or shredder before adding them to the pile speeds up the process. Mix the pile periodically to add air. This recipe sets up an ideal environment for nature's decomposers to work. You will know your compost pile is working when it gets warm in the middle and the material begins to break down and look like soil.

Layer one part green materials with two parts brown materials. **Green:** grass and weeds; fruit and vegetable scraps; blood meal or bone meal; non-woody garden prunings; spent flowers; bouquets. **Brown:** dry leaves; dead, brown plants; brown grass; pine needles; sawdust; chopped wood chips.

BENEFITS OF COMPOST

To the Garden:	To the Environment:
Improves yields of fruits, vegetables and flowers	Turns waste into a valuable resource
Increases organic matter in soil	Saves limited landfill space
Prevents soil erosion	Recycles nutrients back into the soil
Helps to loosen heavy clay soil	Reduces water demands of plants and trees
Attracts & feeds earthworms which add nutrients to your soil	Reduces reliance upon petroleum-based fertilizers
Reduces water demands of plants and trees	To Your Pocketbook:
Assists plants in building sound root structures	Can reduce the need to purchase fertilizers
Balances acidity of soil	Can reduce the frequency of watering which can lower your water bill
Lessens plant stress from drought and freezes	Can reduce the need to purchase commercial mulch
Helps sandy soil retain moisture	
Can extend the growing season	

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Other materials that can be added to your compost pile include: shredded newspaper; paper towel tubes; real wood ashes; natural fiber dryer lint; animal hair; coffee grounds; tea bags and paper filters. **DO NOT** add meat, dairy products, diseased plant material, and cat or dog wastes.

Compost Pile Size & Location



A good size for a backyard compost pile is three to four feet high by four feet wide. This size is large enough to hold heat and still small enough for good air flow. Locate your pile in a well-

drained, shaded area close to your garden and a water source, and away from wooden structures and your neighbors.

Tips

Your compost pile should have the consistency of a wrung-out sponge.

Always place food stuff in the center of the bin and cover with other material.

Add air

Aeration adds to the process of decomposition. Although most bins have air vents on all sides, it is a good idea to aerate the pile by using the handle end of a garden tool or a tool specifically designed for this purpose.

When is compost, compost?

Your compost is ready when the materials you placed in your pile have been transformed and blended into a crumbly soil texture. During the composting process the pile should get between 130° and 160°. A second test for readiness is placing your hand in the compost pile toward the center. The compost should not feel wet or hot, but slightly warm. Ready-to-use compost should feel like rich soil, with a sweet, clean aroma.

Once your compost is finished, you may wish to screen it further. Build your own compost screen from 30" pieces of 2" x 4" lumber and 3/8" hardware cloth or screen. Screening assists the growing process of root vegetables, but it is not required.

