

COMPOSTING RESOURCES

Contact your County
Cooperative Extension:
www.njaes.rutgers.edu/county



Search web for “home composting”:
• www.composting101.com
• www.epa.gov/compost

ABOUT US

At New Jersey Environmental Federation and Clean Water Fund, we are working to build a healthy, green and sustainable future. Join us today!

Our programs include:

- Clean Water, Clean Air
- Healthy Towns, Healthy Schools
- Pollution Prevention & Zero Waste
- EJ Voice - Environmental Justice
- Children’s Health
- Renewable Energy & Green Jobs
- Youth Education

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FOOD WASTE COMPOSTING



Feed the landscape
and the gardens,
not the incinerators
and landfills!

 CLEAN WATER ACTION

 CLEAN WATER FUND

www.cleanwateraction.org/nj

WHAT IS COMPOSTING?

Composting is the natural process of breaking down organic materials (kitchen scraps, grass and leaves) into a nutrient rich soil additive. All living things will eventually decompose; but “composting” can speed up the process to a few weeks or months.



Recycling and composting can reduce greenhouse gas emissions by as much as 42% in the U.S. (Source: USEPA).

PASSIVE VS. ACTIVE COMPOSTING

Passive composting is virtually labor-free. It requires a holding bin and takes between 8-12 months to get finished compost.

Active composting requires more frequent turning and will produce compost much quicker (a few months).

BROWN TO GREEN: A 50:50 MIX

When composting, it is important to maintain a balanced mixture of carbon-rich “brown” and nitrogen-rich “green” materials. Refer to the chart below:

Brown Materials	Green Materials
• dry leaves • sawdust • shredded paper • dry pine needles • straw	• grass clippings • coffee grounds • tea bags • eggshells • fruit scraps • veggie scraps

WHY COMPOST?



There are many benefits to composting. It is a simple and inexpensive way to recycle food scraps and yard waste that would otherwise go to a landfill or incinerator.

GOOD FOR YOU, YOUR WALLET AND THE ENVIRONMENT!

- **Saves you money.** Lowers trash bills and the need to buy commercial soil and fertilizers.
- **Improves your garden & container plants.** Supplies nutrients and microbes needed to make soil healthier and more productive.
- **Saves water.** Helps the soil hold moisture thereby reduces water runoff.
- **Benefits the environment.**
 1. **Recycles** valuable organic resources.
 2. **Avoids** disposal at landfills or incinerators.
 3. **Lowers** use of chemical fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides.
 4. **Reduces** truck traffic and fuel emissions associated with transporting compostable materials off-site.

DO Compost	DO NOT Compost
• grass clippings • pine needles, leaves • old plants & flowers • potting soil • shredded paper • fruit & veggie scraps • coffee grounds • tea bags • eggshells	• meat or fish • dairy products • breads or grains • greasy or oily foods • diseased plants • invasive weeds • pet feces <i>When in doubt, leave it out!</i>

THE FIVE STEPS of COMPOSTING

- 1. **Inside:** Set up a small sealed container on or under counter to hold and carry scraps out to the compost bin.
- 2. **Outside:** Use a closed compost bin to prevent pets or other critters from getting into the compost. Choose an area for your closed bin that is not in direct sunlight and is located in an easily accessible spot on grass or soil. Place the compost bin away from the house.
- 3. **Start your pile:** Add a 6” layer of leaves or wood chips at the bottom. Alternate 4” layers of brown material and 2” layers of green material. Add water as needed. The pile should be as wet as a wrung sponge.
- 4. **Maintain your pile:** Continue to add food scraps year-round by burying them in the pile and providing more brown material as needed. Turn or stir pile to aerate it. If you are not turning your pile, or if you are always adding new materials, the bottom and middle sections may be finished first, even if the top is not. Troubleshooting tips below.
- 5. **Your compost is ready!** In a few short months you’ll have compost ready to use. It will be cool to the touch, dark, crumbly, and earth smelling.



Problem	Solution
Compost smells	Turn the pile, add browns
Too wet	Turn the pile, add brown material
Too dry	Turn the pile, add water
Cool to the touch	Add more greens

HOW TO USE COMPOST

- **Soil Amendment:** Mix in 2-6 inches of compost into soil each year before planting.
- **Potting Soil:** Add one part compost to two parts potting soil.
- **Mulch:** Use compost instead of bark dust or wood chips to hold in moisture and protect roots during the winter. Spread between 2-6 inches around plants and trees, careful to keep the compost away from the trunks of trees.
- **Lawn Top Dressing:** Sprinkle 1/9 to 1 inch of finely sifted compost evenly over the top of your lawn in the spring and the fall. This adds nutrients, helps fight diseases, and may reduce the need to thatch and aerate.
- **Compost Tea:** A great nutritional “drink” to give your plants. To make the tea, put 1 shovel-full of compost in a burlap or cloth bag then submerge in a 10 gallon bucket of water (make larger volumes in the same proportion of compost to water). Let steep for 2-3 days. Apply tea directly to soil or around plants.



GRASS CLIPPING - “CUT IT & LEAVE IT”



The best thing you can do for your lawn is to leave the grass clippings on it.

By doing this, you return valuable nitrogen to the lawn, save money and the environment by not adding commercial chemical fertilizers, lower the water requirements of the lawn, and save precious time by not bagging grass clippings.

In combination with composting, you greatly reduce the amount, cost, and adverse impacts of landfilling and incineration.



Use care when eating vegetables grown on soil suspected of lead contamination. Lead poisoning has been linked to brain and nerve damage, loss of muscle control, learning disabilities, attention deficits, mental retardation, kidney damage and problems with bearing children.

People are poisoned by eating, drinking or breathing in lead particles from sources such as paint, dust, pottery, water pipes, and *soil*. The highest amount of lead in soil is found around homes, playgrounds and buildings painted with lead based paint, near roadways, on sites of old factories or smelters that used lead in the past, and waste disposal areas. All soil contains lead, however, city soil often has the highest amount, ranging between 200 to 1200 parts per million (ppm), yet a safer limit is 100 ppm.

REDUCING EXPOSURE TO LEAD IN SOIL

- **Plant shrubbery** around houses, or plant thick ground cover like ivy, myrtle, pachysandra, and plant grass on bare soil.
- **Cover bare soil** with wood chips or gravel or clean compost and raised beds.
- **Mix clean compost** with soil that has only a little lead in it.
- **Pave the contaminated area** or remove the soil if lead levels are high.
- **Plant gardens away** from possible lead sources such as roads and house foundations, plant in clean compost either mixed into soil or in raised beds.
- **Prevent nearby sources** of lead from mixing with soil. Before scraping paint on clapboards homes, cover soil with a drop cloth and properly dispose of the waste after scrapping.



LEAD IN FRUITS & VEGETABLES



Plants contain less lead than the soil they grow in, but there is still cause for concern. Plants differ in how much lead dust and soil cling to their surface. Wash *all* vegetables. Peel *root* varieties like potatoes and carrots.

Additionally, fruits generally contain less lead than roots or leaves. Tomatoes will contain less lead than leafy vegetables.

TESTING FOR LEAD

Testing for lead and other heavy metals is recommended especially if the topsoil is from an urban area.

1. **Call your local health department** or state environmental laboratories for soil testing methods.
2. **To get a list of NJ certified labs,** call the NJ Department of Environmental Protection at 609-292-3950.
3. **Ask the laboratory:** how the sample is collected; how accurate the test is; is there a cost; and when you will get the results.
4. **Collect soil samples** from areas where children play (e.g. a sandbox or area near the porch), within the yard of the house, garden and/or soil near the road.
5. **Send samples to the laboratory.** After you receive the results, ask the laboratory what the test result means.

REMEMBER! All children between the ages of 6 months & 6 years should be tested for lead each year--no matter the level of lead in soil. Always remember to wash children’s hands after playing and before meals.