

HOME COMPOSTING GUIDE

1. Equipment Required

The only required equipment is a shovel or pitchfork to turn or move the contents of the compost pile.

Equipment you may also want to use:

- * compost bin(s)
- * water hose
- * mower or chipper
- * garden gloves
- * wheelbarrow

2. Build a Compost Pile

Find a location for the pile

Your pile can be built anywhere except up against a structure such as a house or fence. Bacteria and fungus will assist you in the composting process. You want them in the pile, not in the house. Locate your pile at least 2 feet from any structure.

Set up a compost bin (optional)

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What to compost

Do Compost		Do Not Compost
Nitrogens (Green)	Carbons (Browns)	diseased plants
fresh grass	brown leaves	weeds with seeds
flowers	straw	invasive weeds:
garden clippings	shredded paper	-quack grass
annual weeds	wood chips*	-morning glory
vegetable scraps		-buttercup
coffee grounds		-horsetail
teabags		meat, fish, dairy
herbivore manures		cooking oils

*shred branches so the chips are no ore than 1-2" in size A lawn mower may help with this task

Build the pile

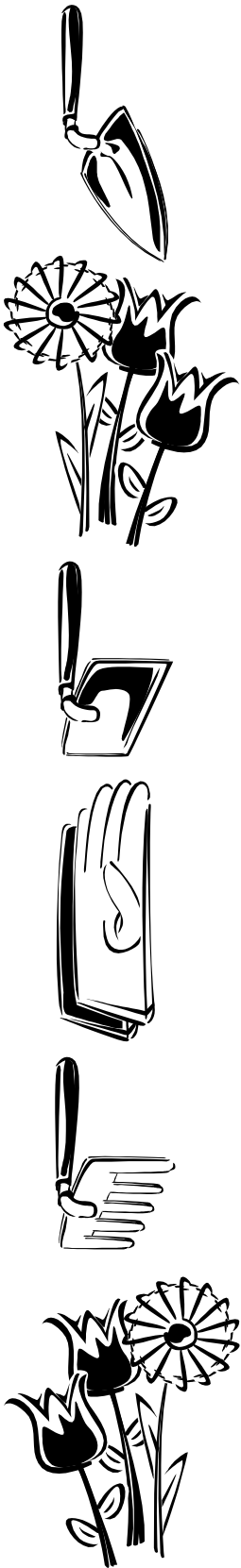
Cold Composting: Simply throw in organic materials as they become available. This results in a slow composting process that may take up to 2 years to complete.

Hot Composting: If you want faster decomposition (6 weeks to 6 months), follow these steps:

- * Mix 3 parts carbon : 1 part nitrogen by volume
- * Add water regularly. The pile should feel damp, like a wrung-out sponge
- * Turn the pile frequently to add air

Cover pile (optional)

Covering the pile retains moisture in the summer and guards against rain the rest of the year.



Monitor the pile (optional)

- * Moisture content: Keep the pile damp, like a wrung out sponge.
- * Temperature: If you are hot composting, the pile will become hot within a few days.

Turn the pile after it cools down and it should reheat one more time. Covering the pile retains moisture in the summer and guards against rain the rest of the year.

Turn the pile (optional)

Mix the pile thoroughly with a pitchfork. Turning adds air. Turn once a week to once a month for a maximum of three turns per year.

3. When is Compost Finished?

The finished compost will take up only 25 - 40% of the space occupied by the original pile. When the individual materials can no longer be identified and the pile resembles dark rich humus, the compost is completed. It will smell sweet, woody, and earthy. It will crumble through your fingers.

If you add materials as you get them, instead of building batches of compost, you will find that after 6 months to two years, the inside and bottom of the pile, i.e., the stuff you added first, has become compost. You may remove this from the bottom of the pile and use it. Return the rest of the materials to the pile location and continue decomposing.

4. Ammending Soil with Finished Compost

Lawn

On established lawns, apply compost once a year in layers 1/4 to 1/2 inch thick. Water well. To prepare soil for a new lawn, till 4 inches of compost into 6 inches of soil.

Trees and shrubs

Lay one inch of compost around trees from one foot away from trunk out past the drip line. A 2 inch layer should be used for shrubs. Apply once per year. To prepare soil for new shrubs, till the soil to a depth of 8 - 10 inches. The depth should be at least twice the width of the root ball. Apply a 4 inch layer of compost and mix thoroughly into soil. If soil is very poor use 6 inches of compost instead.

Garden

Lay 1/2 to 1 inch of compost on top of soil. If possible, till 2 - 4 inches into the top 10 inches of soil. To establish a new garden or prepare garden for planting, till the soil to a depth of 8 - 10 inches. Apply a layer of 4 inches of compost and mix thoroughly into soil. If soil is very poor use 6 inches of compost instead. Mix the additional compost into the top 4 inches of soil.

Potted plants

Do not plant in pure compost. To root properly, plants must have the texture provided by soil. Your potting mix may be 1/4 to 1/3 compost. The remainder may be good potting soil. Many organic gardening books have "recipes" for potting soil and recommend a combination of compost, worm castings, potting soil, and other organic materials.

5. Building a Compost Bin

www.kitsapgov.com/sw/compost.htm has a variety of plans for building compost bins. If you don't have access to the internet, call Kitsap 1 at 360-337-5777 and ask for our "Down To Earth" publication.



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