



Backyard Composting

Nature's Way



a guide to backyard composting in Bergen County

For millions of years nature has recycled its own organic waste through a process known as composting. One walk through the woods and this dynamic process can be seen in action. The leaves that have fallen during the autumn and have accumulated are slowly composting into the soil that nourishes the plants and trees that grow from the forest floor. Composting is nature's way of recycling.

Most Bergen County homeowners are already recycling materials such as newspaper, glass, and aluminum. However, many residents don't realize that leaves, grass clippings, and other yard and organic wastes can also be recycled.

In 1987, New Jersey passed the Mandatory Source Separation and Recycling Act. Among other initiatives, this act prohibited the disposal of leaves at any solid waste facility in New Jersey. As a result, most municipalities collect leaves from residents and compost them at their own municipal compost facility or ship them to a private compost facility, all at a high cost to the taxpayer. However, there's an easier and more economical way — BACKYARD COMPOSTING.

By composting leaves and other vegetative and organic waste in your own backyard, you can help your municipality save money and create a rich compost that can be used for potting soil, humus and other garden applications. This guide was created to familiarize you with the methods and procedures of backyard composting so you can begin to compost on your own.

Why Compost?

- ◆ Composting is the most practical and convenient way to handle your yard wastes.
- ◆ Compost improves your soil and the plants growing in it.
- ◆ If you have a garden, a lawn, trees, shrubs, or even planter boxes, you have a use for compost.

How Does Composting Work?

Composting is the biological degradation of organic matter. All organic matter has certain bacteria, fungi, and other living critters that live on and around it. These organisms eat the organic matter and break it down to a material called compost. This process happens to all organic material, however, the process can take place at a slow or fast rate, depending upon how the organic material is prepared for composting.

How Do I Compost?

Composting your leaves, grass, yard waste and other organic material is easy. Many garden centers and hardware stores sell ready-made compost bins made from plastic or wood. However, if you don't want to buy a compost bin, one can easily be made.

A homemade composting bin can be fashioned from chicken wire, snow fence, wood pallets, or scrap wood.



Ready-made compost bin

Homemade compost bin made from wood pallets



Homemade compost bin made from wood scraps



Homemade compost bin made from chicken wire, snow fence or chain link fence

A Recipe for Composting



The types of material you use in your composting bin will determine the quality of the finished product. The following recipes will ensure that your composting process will produce the highest quality compost.

Ingredients

Brown Material

-  Leaves
-  Twigs
-  Sawdust

Green Material

-  Grass Clippings
-  Flowers
-  Weeds
-  Food Waste (vegetable and fruit matter only; no meat scraps!)

Slow Compost Recipe

Ready in 12-18 months

Ingredients

- Brown Material
- Green Material
- Rainwater

Compost can be made simply by adding layers of available fresh yard waste to a bin over a period of several months or even years.

Directions:

1. Set compost bin where it is sure to get rained on. (Remember to leave bin uncovered.)
2. Put your BROWN and GREEN material in your bin. In 12-18 months, the material at the bottom and center of the pile should be composted.
3. Remove finished compost. Use the uncomposted material to start a new batch.

Fast Compost Recipe

Ready in 5-15 weeks

Ingredients

- Brown Material
- Green Material
- Water

The fastest way to make compost is to build a "hot" pile in a heap, or compost bin. This method requires frequent turning of the pile.

Directions:

1. Put your BROWN and GREEN material in your bin and add water.
2. Turn the pile twice a week. Be sure to keep the pile moist.
3. Any material not decomposed after the 5-15 weeks can be used to start a new cycle.

Trouble Shooting

Symptom	Problem	Solution
Rotten Odor	excess moisture	turn pile, or add dry, porous material.
	material tightly packed	turn pile, or make pile smaller.
Ammonia Odor	too much nitrogen	add high carbon material, such as sawdust, wood chips, or straw.
Pile is dry	not enough water; too much woody material	turn and moisten; add fresh green waste
Pile is wet but not composting	Lack of nitrogen	add fresh green waste

Compost Uses

MULCH: Spread compost around annual plantings, trees, shrubs, and exposed slopes. This will smother weeds, protect soil, and keep roots moist.

SOIL CONDITIONER: Mix several inches of compost into garden beds or soil surrounding new trees and shrubs before planting.

POTTING SOIL: Make your own potting soil mix by using equal parts of compost and sand or soil.

Other Resources:

- Backyard Composting, 1992, Harmonious Press, PO Box 1865-100, Ojai, CA, 93024
- Let it Rot! The Home Gardener's Guide to Composting, 1975, Stu Campbell, Garden Way Publishing, VT.

Bergen County Utilities Authority Recycling Hotline:
(201) 641-5341

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