

Using Compost:

Compost is a great soil amendment. Mix two to five inches of compost into vegetable and flower gardens each year before planting.

Use finished compost as mulch to improve the quality of your soil. Spread an inch or two of compost around annual flowers and vegetables, and up to six inches around trees and shrubs.

Mix finely sifted compost with sand and sprinkle evenly over lawns. Using compost on your lawn will improve its ability to use fertilizers more efficiently so that less is needed.

Resources:

City of Stockton's Recycling Information
Hotline - (209) 937-8831

Many books on composting are available at your local library or bookstore:

Worms Eat My Garbage: How to Set Up & Maintain a Worm Composting System
Author: Mary Appelhof
ISBN: 0-942256-10-7

Worms Eat Our Garbage: Classroom Activities for a Better Environment
Author: Mary Appelhof, Mary Frances Fenton, and Barbara Loss Harris
ISBN: 0-942256-05-0

Search the internet! A vast array of resources is available at your fingertips!

Solid Waste and Recycling

City of Stockton - Stewart/Eberhardt Building
22 East Weber Avenue, Room 301
Stockton, CA 95202-2317

Phone: (209) 937-8831

Fax: (209) 937-7115

COMPOSTING AT HOME

A comprehensive how-to guide for starting a compost pile at home.



Ingredients:

DO COMPOST:	DON'T COMPOST:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• All fruit & vegetable trimmings• Coffee grounds and filters• Tea bags• Old potting soil• Rinsed-out, crushed eggshells• Used paper towels• Yard waste (i.e shrub trimmings, leaves and grass)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meat, bones or fish• Dairy products or grease• Grains, beans or breads• Dog, cat or bird feces• Sawdust from plywood/treated wood• Woody prunings (in closed-air systems, worm bins, or underground)

Remember: Composting fruit and vegetable trimmings requires special care. To avoid rodents, flies and bad odors, just follow the simple guidelines in this brochure. Also, the Health Department requires a rodent-resistant system. Use a container with a lid, a floor, and no holes bigger than 1/4 inch, or bury food scraps at least one-foot underground.

Getting Started:

CHOOSING A BIN:

Bins are not needed for composting, however, they keep piles neat, organized and safe from animals.

BIN REQUIREMENTS:

Bin size is important for reaching for the proper temperature. A bin approximately 3 ft. by 3 ft. by 3 ft. is considered as the minimum size for hot, fast composting.

Your bin should have a snug-fitting lid, and holes in the bottom or sides for ventilation. To keep rodents out, the holes need to be 1/4" or smaller.

BIN PLACEMENT:

Place the bin in a convenient location such as a pantry, kitchen corner, laundry room, garage, basement, patio, deck, or in your garden. Make sure it is not in an area where it will freeze or overheat.

BUILDING YOUR LAYERS:

Step 1: Mix two parts brown (dry leaves, small twigs, straw, etc.) with one part green (grass clippings, kitchen scraps, etc.). This 2:1 ratio provides the best mix of carbon (brown materials) to nitrogen (greens).

Make sure to chop or break up any large pieces to help them decompose faster.

Step 2: Moisten your pile.

Do not over water your pile. Too much moisture can have an adverse effect on your pile. A properly moistened pile should be the dampness of a wrung-out sponge.

Step 3: Turn your pile regularly frequently to add air to the pile.

Compost needs air to maintain high internal temperature levels. The most efficient decomposing bacteria work best in temperatures between 110 degrees Fahrenheit and 160 degrees Fahrenheit. A hotter pile means you will see the finished product - compost - in no time at all!

In addition, frequent turning helps prevent unwelcome odors.

Step 4: Your compost is ready to use when it looks like moist soil.

Frequently Asked Question:

Doesn't compost smell bad?

No. Compost should not create an odor if it is properly maintained. Finished compost should smell slightly sweet and look like moist soil. If your compost is smelly, your pile may need more air or the balance of browns to greens is off.

Troubleshooting:

Problem: Bin attracts flies.

Nothing attracts flies faster than exposed food. To counter this problem, make a hole in the center of the pile and "bury" the food. If you choose not to bury the food, place a layer of garden waste (i.e. leaves) over the exposed food before closing the lid. This should help eliminate the problem.

Problem: Slow compost production.

Making compost is not an exact science. Many factors including moisture level, temperature, green to brown ratio, or too large of materials can be the cause at any given time.

Two simple things to check first:

1. Moisture level. The pile should be as damp as a wrung out sponge.
2. Size. If necessary cut or shred the material into smaller pieces for faster decomposition.

Problem: Difficulty turning the pile.

Turning your compost pile is essential to the quick production of compost. While compost is bound to occur given time, turning the pile introduces air into the pile allowing for faster decomposition.

It is not essential to turn over every bit of material in the pile. Introducing air into the pile can easily be accomplished by using a stick to poke at the pile or twisting a gardening fork in the pile. However, the more air introduced, the faster you will be able to enjoy the finished product!