Why Compost?

- Yard and kitchen trash make up approximately 30% of all material in the waste stream and can be composted.
- Compost is a natural and low cost alternative to chemical fertilizers.
- Helps to minimize weed growth in the garden.
- Adds organic material to soils.
- Improves soil structure by providing aeration and holds moisture.
- When used as mulch or added to the top one inch of soil, studies have shown that compost helps prevent plant diseases.
- Helps to prevent erosion.
- Can be used to "clean up" contaminated soils and absorbs odor.
- Removes solids, oil, grease, and heavy metals from stormwater runoff.

What to Compost

The IN List

Animal manure	Cardboard rolls
Clean paper	Coffee grounds & filters
Cotton rags	Dryer & vacuum cleaner
Lint Eggshells	Fireplace ashes
Fruits & vegetables	Grass clippings
Hair & fur	Hay & straw
Houseplants	Leaves
Nut shells	Sawdust
Shredded newspaper	Tea bags
Wood chips	Wool rags

Yard trimmings

The OUT List

Leave Out/Reason Why

- Black walnut tree leaves or twigs – Releases substances that might be harmful to plants
- Coal or charcoal ash – Might contain substances harmful to plants
- Dairy products (e.g., butter, egg yolks, milk, sour cream, yogurt) – Create odor problems & attract pests such as rodents and flies
- Diseased or insect-ridden plants – Diseases or insects might survive & be transferred back to other plants
- Fats, grease, lard, or oils – Create odor problems & attract pests such as rodents & flies
- Meat or fish bones & scraps – Create odor problems & attract pests such as rodents & flies
- Pet wastes (e.g., dog or cat feces, soiled cat litter) – Might contain parasites, bacteria, germs, pathogens, & viruses harmful to humans
- Yard trimmings treated with chemical pesticides – Might kill beneficial composting organisms

3219 S Canal
Carlsbad NM 88220
Phone 575-628-1532
Fax 575-885-5386
swcd@carlsbadsoilandwater.org
or visit our website
www.carlsbadsoilandwater.org

Composting in the Xeric Garden

Carlsbad Soil and Water Conservation District

Getting Started

Composting can be as simple or as involved as you would like, and depends on how much yard waste you have, how fast you want results, and the effort you are willing to invest.

Cold or Slow Composting

Cold composting is the simplest method of composting. There is no maintenance required, but the composting process will take several months to a year to complete. This method works well if you have small amounts of waste, don't have time to work with the compost pile, and/or not in a hurry to have the compost. Keep weeds and diseased plants out of the mix since the temperatures reached with cold composting may not be high enough to kill the weed seeds or disease-causing organisms.

Hot Composting

Hot composting requires more work, but produces usable compost much faster. Depending on the weather and the ingredients, you could have finished compost in a couple of weeks. Hot composting works best when high-carbon material is mixed evenly with high-nitrogen materials. Minimum pile dimensions should be 3' x 3' x 3' for efficient heating. For best results a bigger pile should be made. The pile will shrink as decomposition occurs. Hot piles reach internal temperatures of 110 to 160 degrees Fahrenheit.

Turning a compost pile with a shovel.

Vermicomposting

Verimcomposting is using worms to compost. This method takes very little space and can be done year round in a basement or garage. It is a great way to compost kitchen wastes.

Composting using a commercial bin.

What You Need

No matter which method of composting that you decide to use, you will need a few basic tools - A pitchfork, shovel, water hose, and a bin, should you decide to use one.

All composting requires three basic ingredients:

Browns - Includes such materials as dead leaves, branches, twigs (high-carbon materials)

Greens - Includes materials such as grass clippings, vegetable waste, fruit scraps, and coffee grounds (high-nitrogen materials)

Water - Either rain water or from the tap.

Steps

1) Choose a level, well-drained site, preferably near your garden.
2) There are many styles of compost bins. These may be as simple as a moveable bin formed by wire mesh or a more substantial structure consisting of several compartments. There are many commercially available bins. While a bin will help contain the pile, it is not absolutely necessary. You can build your pile directly on the ground. You may want to place some woody material under the pile to aid with air circulation.
3) To build your pile, use either: equal and alternating layers of brown and green material; or mix the two together in the pile. If you use layers, make each layer 2 to 4 inches thick. Some people find that mixing the two together is more effective than layering. If you are low on high-nitrogen material, you can add a small amount of commercial fertilizer containing nitrogen. Adding a few shovels of soil will help the pile get a good start; soil adds commonly found decomposing organisms.
4) Water periodically. The pile should be moist but not saturated. If the pile is too wet, anaerobic microorganisms (those that can live without oxygen) will continue the process. These don't work as well as the aerobic organisms. Bad odors also are more likely if the pile is saturated.
5) Punch holes in the sides of the pile for aeration.
6) The pile will heat up and then begin to cool. Start turning when the pile's internal temperature peaks at about 130 to 140 degrees Fahrenheit. You can track this with a compost thermometer, or reach into the pile to determine if it is uncomfortably hot to the touch.
7) During the composting season, check your bin regularly to assure moisture and aeration are present in the material being composted.
8) Turn every day or two and you should get compost in less than 4 weeks. Turning every other week will make compost in 1 to 3 months. Finished compost will smell sweet and be cool and crumbly to the touch.