



How to Maintain a Community Compost Site



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MAINTAINING A COMPOST SITE



Number or identify your bins. Above you will see them numbered as 1, 2, and 3.

- Create a sign that says “ADD HERE” and place it on the bin you would like to have people contribute to. We will refer to it as the contribution bin and label it as Bin 1.
- When the contribution bin gets full, you will flip Bin 1 into Bin 2 and start the process over again by contributing raw material to Bin 1.
- You will not want to add fresh contributions to Bin 2. You will use a sign that says “DO NOT ADD” to try and prevent this from happening.
- The next time your contribution bin is full, move BIN 3 into a “RESTING PILE” and repeat above steps. Your resting pile is now on its way to being finished compost!

Each bin should contain compost at a different level of decomposition, progressing from the fresh material in Bin 1 to the material that will be ready for your resting pile in Bin 3. By labeling your bins and not adding fresh contributions to the bins in the later stages of decomposition, you are speeding up the process and creating a better, more evenly finished product.

WATERING YOUR COMPOST

Ideally, you want your compostable material to be somewhat wet, like a wrung-out sponge. Watering and flipping your compost will produce a finished product faster. Not everyone has easy access to water at their compost site; however, if you have even limited access to water and are able to water during the act of flipping, this is ideal. Flipping your compost bins on a rainy day is a great natural alternative to watering directly.

HOW AND WHEN TO USE “RESTING PILE” COMPOST

Your resting pile can remain as a heap, be transferred to another bin, or be added directly into an unused or dormant garden bed. You can leave your resting pile open or cover it with tarp.

Your resting pile may still have items like apple cores, leaves, wood chips, etc. This is normal, as your compost has not fully matured yet. You can either screen the material or leave it as is. Screening the material will create a finished product faster and create more effective compost. Leaving “noticeable material” intact will limit your compost to a top dressing.

In the fall, apply your RESTING PILE compost directly to unused garden beds. Cover RESTING PILE compost with hay, straw, leaves, or wetted shredded newspaper. This will insulate the compost so that it can continue to break down.

When you are ready to plant, rake away any noticeable material and throw it back into your ADD HERE bin.

DOCUMENTATION PROCESS

We like to document how much material we are keeping out of the landfill. We find that documenting contributions will show people how their participation CAN make a significant difference in the waste stream. Knowing the amount of material being brought in will also shed some light on the amount of compost you can expect to generate. See the Compost Maintenance Log in the Tools section for an example of a contribution log. The log can be placed in a ziplock bag with a pen for people to document on site. Another option is to allow people to track their contributions online.

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

Problem: Not Enough Nitrogen

Solution: Engage more residents and businesses. See Restaurant Composting for more tips on how to properly increase your nitrogen source. Coffee shops, with their huge daily supplies of spent coffee grounds, are a natural place to start.

Problem: Not Enough Brown Source

Solution: Start stockpiling brown source material immediately. Leaves, shredded nonglossy paper, cardboard, woodchips, hay, straw, sawdust, etc. can be accumulated seasonally for free. Wood chips are usually the easiest material to acquire at any time of the year. Municipalities will often drop off wood chips free of charge. Contact your local alderman to find out who handles tree trimming or leaf collection in your area. Encourage residents to drop off their yard material and leaves in your designated brown source area. This is best done in fall when people have more material to contribute.

Problem: Wood Chips Not Breaking Down

Solution: The problem with using wood chips as a brown source is that they take a long time to break down. You can either filter the woodchips in the late-cycle screening process and continue to use them as a brown source or you can apply the resting wood-chipped filled compost as a top dressing to gardens in the spring. The woodchips will act as a water retention agent on the top of the garden as healthy compost infiltrates the soil.

Problem: Too Much Nitrogen (Odor, Flies, etc.)

Solution: Nitrogen helps create compost faster, but it can also cause problems in your compost pile if not properly covered. Make sure your food contributions are adequately covered with enough brown source material. For every one part of food residuals you take in, be sure to cover with two parts of brown material.

Flipping your bins more frequently will also help food residuals break down faster, create more room in your bin, and decrease the likelihood of anaerobic bacteria forming.

Also reconsider how many restaurants and residents are contributing. Contact your Kompost Kids representative if you feel your site is ill-equipped to handle the volume.

Problem: People Not Covering Contributions

Solution: People need constant reminders on how to compost properly. Signage will play a huge role in this effort. Another helpful solution is to set up a list-serve for people to chat with one another about site maintenance. This way, reminders can be sent out to the group about proper composting and the importance of covering contributions.

WINTER COMPOSTING

Community composting can be performed all year long, but the hard freezes encountered in colder climates pose special challenges. It may be that winter composting is limited to stockpiling frozen kitchen scraps for later incorporation after spring thaws. Decomposition slows down considerably at the lowest temperatures and may stop completely, but frozen material will “ripen” upon thawing and create more surface area for the active composting process to begin when mixed back in with a good brown source in the spring.

You can winterize a compost bin in a number of different ways. Stacking bales of hay around the perimeter of a square or rectangular bin may provide sufficient insulation to keep pile temperatures moderate through all but the coldest winters. Old carpet remnants, blankets, or stacks of cardboard may also help, if added to buffer the tops of open piles or bins from hard frosts. Lining the interior walls of pallet-based bins or other porous structures with large sheets of cardboard may also help to retain some warmth and ensure continued bacterial activity.

One strategy for winterizing a compost site borrows from household composting practice in simply planning on the deep freeze ahead. Make sure your site goes into November with 2 to 3 empty bins available for winter stockpiling. Partially composted material - much of it trimmings or entire withered plants from the garden - will be fairly dry and will not present odor problems or attract vermin. You can make a separate resting pile for this material and either distribute it to garden beds for sheet composting over the winter or leave as a larger windrow to rot down at a later date. The key is to plan ahead and enter the winter months with a backup option for storing accumulating, but frozen and largely inert, material for spring composting.



COMPOST SITE RULES SIGNAGE EXAMPLE



KOMPOST KIDS kompostkids.com

Contribute to the "Add Here" Bin

Cover your contribution with the brown source.

WHAT'S IN:

veggie or fruit scraps
egg shells
untreated yard waste
coffee grounds & filters

WHAT'S OUT:

meat or dairy
pet waste
metal or plastic
diseased plants

Have you added enough
brown source material?

2 to **1**
Brown **Green**
source **source**

Kompost Kids Inc. - Community Compost Program Garden Partnership

Garden Name:
Attention:
Address:
City, State, Zip:
Phone:
E-mail:

The Kompost Kids Inc. agree to:

- Provide educational and outreach materials on how to create and maintain a community compost site (nonprinted)
- Stencils to create signs for identification and rules
- Connections to brown source material
- Online communication system to reach out to compost volunteers and ask questions in an open forum
- Help obtain compost bin construction materials & tools if garden has no funds
- Master Composter to do a one time on-site compost training with garden coordinator
- Unlimited compost training on community work days at Kompost Kids demonstration sites
- Utilize compost site for neighborhood businesses that coordinate pick up schedule with Kompost Kids
- Provide one/year (physical) assistance with community compost site

{GARDEN} agrees to:

- Obtain funding for needed construction materials
- Display signage and maintain community compost site based on Kompost Kids best practices
- Utilize community made compost in garden
- Address any community compost site concerns or ideas to Kompost Kids online communication system
- Encourage residents, gardeners, and businesses to contribute food scraps and other organic material to compost site
- Promote Kompost Kids partnership on website, social media outlets, or any other appropriate promotional material

{Garden Coordinator}

Title

Printed Name

Signed this _____ day of _____, 20 _____.