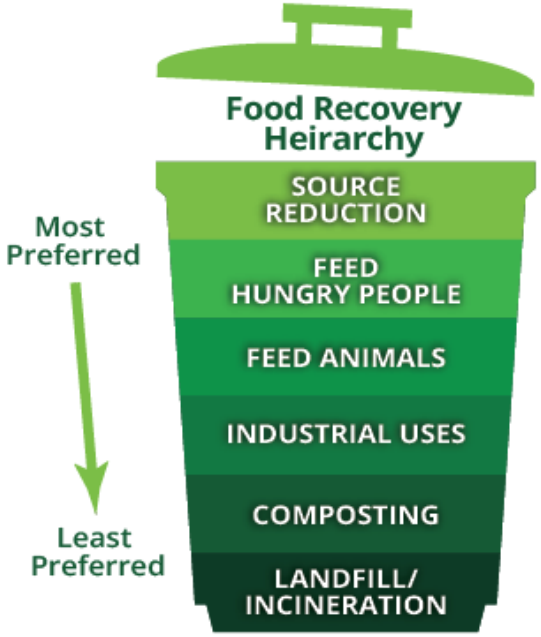
Facts and Benefits of Composting

Composting is the accelerated and controlled breakdown of organic material such as food and yard waste that creates a beneficial soil amendment.

Food scraps and yard trimmings make up about 29% of what we throw away. This presents significant opportunity to reduce landfill waste!

Composting:

- **Enriches soil, helping retain moisture and suppress plant diseases and pests.**
- **Reduces the need for chemical fertilizers, which helps decrease fertilizer runoff into bodies of water.**
- **Encourages the production of beneficial bacteria and fungi that break down organic matter to create humus, a rich nutrient-filled material.**
- **Reduces methane emissions from landfills and lowers your carbon footprint.**
- **Conserves energy by eliminating the need for waste hauling and management.**



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For additional information and recommendations, see https://www.tn.gov/environment/home-composting.

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Composting at Home

What can *you* do?

Learn to make compost for healthy soil and to reduce landfill waste.

Four Key Ingredients

All composting requires four key ingredients to be successful: BROWNS, GREENS, WATER, and AIR

BROWNS

This includes carbon rich materials such as dead leaves, branches and twigs, wood shavings, paper towels, newspaper, and uncoated paper products

GREENS

This includes nitrogen rich materials such as fresh grass clippings, fruit and vegetable waste, flowers, hair and fur, and coffee grounds.

WATER

Composting organisms need a moist environment. Organisms including earth worms, roly polys, good bacteria, and beneficial fungi need water to live. If the compost is too wet or too dry, these organisms will die.

AIR

It is important for the composting organisms to also have oxygen. By helping air circulate through the pile by turning it or stirring it, the compost pile remains aerobic. This means that oxygen is present. When oxygen isn't present, foul odors can occur.

DO NOT ADD: dairy, meat, fats, bones, oils, pet waste, seafood scraps, plastic, stickers from fruits and vegetables, metals, glass, treated or painted wood

Basic Instructions

3 parts BROWN + 1 part GREEN + WATER + AIR = COMPOST

1. **Select a location** - The location should be dry, moderately sunny, and conveniently located.
2. **Construct or purchase a bin** - Bins are available in stores or online, or you can build one using supplies like pallets, t-posts and chicken wire, or cement blocks.
3. **Add materials** - Materials should be added in a **3:1** ratio by volume of browns to greens. For example, for one bucket of fruit and veggie scraps you should add three buckets of leaves and wood shavings.
4. **Stir occasionally** - Use a pitchfork or shovel to stir materials once a week or twice a month. Stirring helps add oxygen to your compost pile!
5. **Add water as necessary** - Add water only when your compost looks dry. Compost should have about the same moisture as a sponge that has been wrung out.
6. **Wait until most bacterial activity diminishes** - Steam will be present while bacterial activity is occurring. All steam will diminish and compost will no longer have identifiable food items.
7. **Screen compost (optional)** - Use a metal screen to sort large, un-finished items out of the compost. The large pieces can be used to inoculate a new pile.
8. **Age your compost (optional, but ideal)** - Allow your compost pile to sit for several weeks to ensure all bacterial activity has ended. Do not add new material during this time. Finished compost will smell earthy, not sour, and will look like a dark, crumbly soil.

Compost Uses

1. **Mulching material** - Use compost to mulch around trees, shrubs, and landscaping. It will help provide the soil with vital nutrients and allow the ground below to retain more moisture.
2. **Soil amendment** - Mix compost into the soil at planting time. This will provide nutrients to plants at the root level.
3. **Compost tea** - Compost tea refers to the nutrient rich liquid matter released by compost. Make your own by adding a shovel full of finished compost to a 5 gallon bucket full of water. Let the mixture steep for 12-24 hours, and then simply pour the liquid on the area or plants you wish to use it on.
4. **Erosion control** - Compost can be used in easily flooded and erosion prone areas to help retain moisture and eliminate runoff.
5. **Top-dressing lawn areas** - Spread anywhere from 1 - 3 inches of compost over a lawn area. The compost will eventually settle into the soil leaving it much healthier and able to retain more water. Adding compost to lawns also reduces the need for fertilizers which can be harmful if they make their way to bodies of water.