

## Troubleshooting

Symptoms	Problems	Solutions
Bad odor.	Not enough air, or too much green material.	Mix the pile, or add in more brown material.
Composts too slowly.	Not enough water.	Moisten and mix the pile.
Pile is damp and warm only in center.	Pile is too small.	Collect more material and mix it into the pile.
Pile is damp and sweet-smelling but no heat.	Lack of green material.	Mix in more green material like fresh grass clippings, yard trimmings, and weeds.

## Other Resources:

For more information on composting or DNR yard waste regulations, contact your local municipal recycling staff, a county extension agent, or a DNR regional recycling specialist.

Department Of Natural Resources  
Bureau of Waste Management  
P.O. Box 7921 Madison, WI 53707  
(608) 266-2111

Special thanks to the Alameda County Home Composting Education Program for providing material used in this brochure.

Illustrations: Joel Morris

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources provides equal opportunity in its employment, programs, services and functions under an Affirmative Action Plan. If you have any questions, please write to Equal Opportunity Office, Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240.

This publication is available in alternate format (large print, Braille, audio tape, etc.) upon request. Call 608-266-2111 for more information.



Printed on Recycled Paper

GP10/01

## Home Composting

### Reap a Heap of Benefits



Wisconsin  
Department of  
Natural Resources  
PUB-WA-072 2001

## Wisconsin's Recycling Law

In recent years, as much as 30% of all household trash generated in Wisconsin consisted of yard waste. That's 300,000 tons of leaves, grass clippings, and other biodegradable, compostable materials sent to landfills and incinerators each year.

Yard waste in landfills may contribute to methane gas and leachate which pollute the air and local water supplies. The moisture in yard waste causes it to burn poorly in incinerators, raising pollution levels and operating costs.



Since January 1993, state law bans yard waste—leaves, grass clippings, garden debris, and twigs, brush, and branches smaller than six inches in diameter—from landfills and most incinerators. This law does not apply to stumps, roots or shrubs with intact root balls, or incinerators which burn waste to recover energy.

## A Burning Issue

Another popular method of leaf and brush disposal—backyard burning—pollutes the air, creates a fire hazard, and is a nuisance to neighbors. State air quality and fire control rules restrict backyard burning, and many communities prohibit it entirely. For a cleaner, safer alternative to burning your yard waste, try composting!

## Why Compost?

The best method for getting rid of yard waste is also the easiest. Composting is nature's way of turning your yard "waste" into a valuable soil conditioner.

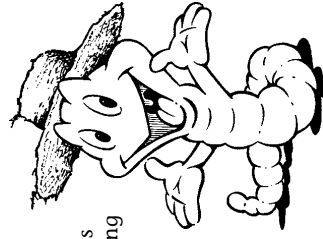
### Composting:

**Saves you money** by reducing the need for expensive bags and commercial soil additives.

**Helps your garden and lawn** by improving the fertility and health of your soil.

**Saves water** by helping the soil hold moisture and reducing water runoff.

**Benefits the environment** by recycling valuable organic resources and extending the lives of our landfills.



## What Can You Compost?

### Do Compost

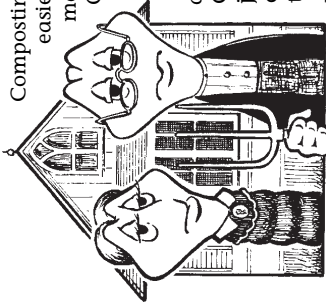
- grass clippings
- leaves
- weeds & garden debris
- small brush, twigs
- wood ash
- sawdust & wood chips
- egg shells\*
- coffee grounds\*

### Do Not Compost

- meat, bones, fat
- dairy products
- oils
- whole branches, logs
- pet or human waste
- charcoal briquette ash
- sawdust or ash from treated wood

\*Contact your local community to see if food scraps may be composted in your area.

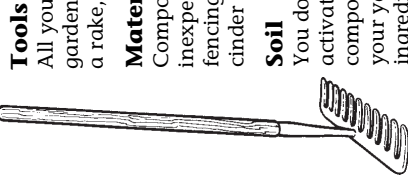
## Composting Made Simple



Composting is a lot easier than you may think. Organic material breaks down around us in nature all the time. Composting is just a method of speeding up the process!

Most compost bin designs are so simple they can be built in a few hours. Once you gather your yard waste and form it into a pile, the only time you'll spend is for occasional maintenance. Then sit back and let nature do the rest!

## Composting Equipment



### Tools

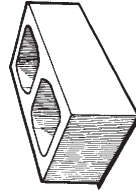
All you need are some basic gardening tools, like a pitchfork, a rake, and a shovel.

### Materials

Compost bins can be built with inexpensive materials like snow fencing, woven wire, or used cinder blocks and lumber.

### Soil

You don't need store-bought "soil activators" or potting soil to compost. One inch of soil from your yard or garden has all the ingredients needed to start the composting process.

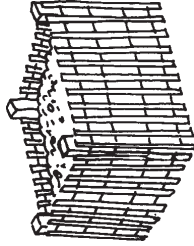


## Composting Bins

Here are three simple ways to make compost bins:

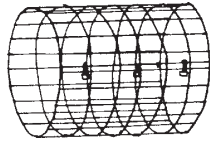
### Snow Fence Bin

Buy a length of prefabricated snow fence and fasten two - by - fours (2x4s) to each corner to form a square. (For a 4'x4'x4' compost pile, purchase 16 feet of snow fencing.)



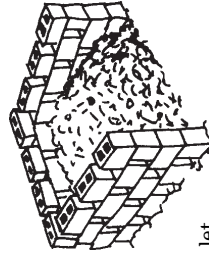
### Woven Wire Bin

Purchase a length of woven wire and fasten the ends with several small chain snaps (available at any hardware store) to make a circle. To calculate the length of wire needed, lay a piece of string around the outside of the pile and measure it. (For a 4'x4'x4' compost pile, purchase 16 feet of woven wire.)



### Block or Brick Bin

Pile up bricks, cement blocks, or rocks to form three sides of a square container. Lay the blocks without mortar, leaving spaces between to let air circulate.



## Uses For Finished Compost

Compost is ready to harvest when it is reduced to a crumbly, sweet smelling material called humus. If some pieces are not decomposed, you can sift those out and use them to start a new batch.

Compost improves soil structure, holds in moisture and plant nutrients, and promotes strong, healthy root systems for plant growth. Here are the most common ways to use compost:

### Mix It Into Soil

- Mix 3 - 6 inches of compost into lawn soil before seeding for grass.
- Mix 3 - 6 inches of compost into garden soil before planting.



- Mix compost into the soil of exposed sloping areas to help fight erosion.

### Use It As A Mulch

Add compost as a mulch around flowers, shrubs, and trees to discourage weeds, help soil retain moisture, and protect roots from alternate freezing and thawing during winter months.



## Composting Recipes

### Shopping List:

**Green yard waste:** grass clippings, green yard trimmings and weeds.  
**Brown yard waste:** leaves, small brush and twigs (1/2" diameter or less), woody plant prunings, sawdust.

### Lazy Person's Compost

**Ingredients:**  
 Green and brown yard waste, water as needed.

### Directions:

- In a heap or bin, layer your yard waste as it accumulates. For faster composting, chop it up first with a hoe or lawn mower.
- Water so compost is kept as moist as a wrung-out sponge.
- In a year to 18 months, the material at the bottom and center of the pile will be dark, crumbly compost. Sift, and use the uncomposted material to start a new batch.



### Fast Compost

#### Ingredients:

Green and brown yard waste, water as needed.

#### Directions:

- Mix one part green yard waste with two parts brown to form a pile (an average size is 4'x4'x4'). For fast composting, chop it up first with a hoe or lawn mower.
- Mix in one inch of soil.
- Keep the pile as moist as a wrung-out sponge.
- Turn the pile every week to let air in.
- Finished compost will take between four weeks and one year, depending on how often you turn it and how well you maintain the moisture of the pile.

