

Resources

COMPOST DEMONSTRATION SITE

Stop by Emma Prusch Memorial Park at 647 South King Road, San Jose to see various compost bins and a worm compost bin. Open all daylight hours.

FREE WORKSHOPS

Sign up for our backyard composting workshops! Call the Rotline for a current schedule.

BOOKS

Rodale Book Of Composting, 1992 G. Gershuny
Saint Martin's Press, New York, NY, 278 pp.

Worms Eat My Garbage, 1997 Mary Appelhof
Flowers Press, Kalamazoo, MI 162 pp. Second Edition

WORM SOURCES

Sonoma Valley Worm Farm 800-447-6996
www.ciwmb.ca.gov/organics/worms

THE ROT LINE 408-918-4640

The Rotline answers compost questions.

ABOUT THE MASTER COMPOSTER PROGRAM

The Home Composting Education Program teaches a ten week training course in backyard composting to interested volunteers once a year. Training consists of approximately 50 hours of classroom and hands-on instruction. Volunteers agree to give back 50 hours of volunteer service in the form of composting workshops and other educational outreach. For more information contact:

County of Santa Clara
Home Composting Education Program
1553 Berger Drive, Building 1,
San Jose, CA 95112
408-918-4640
compost@pln.sccgov.org



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Worm Composting

And other methods for recycling fruit & vegetable trimmings



Recycle your food scraps indoors or out.
It's fun! It's smart! It's recycling!

Santa Clara County
Home Composting Education Program

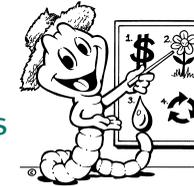
408-918-4640



Recycling & Waste Reduction Commission
of Santa Clara County

Why compost?

Composting is nature's way of recycling. It is a satisfying way to turn your fruit, vegetable and yard trimmings into a dark, crumbly, sweet-smelling soil conditioner.



COMPOSTING:

- ~ **Saves you money** by lowering garbage bills and replacing store-bought soil conditioners.
- ~ **Helps garden and house plants** 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 life of our landfills.

COMPOST DO'S AND DON'TS:

DO COMPOST:

All fruit & vegetable trimmings
Coffee grounds & filters
Tea bags
Eggshells
Used paper towels
Soft green plant trimmings

DON'T COMPOST:

Meat, bones & fish
Dairy products & grease
Grains, beans & breads
Dog, cat & bird feces
Sawdust from plywood or treated wood
Woody prunings (in closed-air systems, worm bins, or underground)



Remember...composting fruit & vegetable trimmings requires special care. To avoid rodents, flies and bad odors just follow the simple guidelines in this brochure. 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.

Basic Composting

- ~ Some time & effort to set up and maintain
- ~ 3'x3' or more yard space needed
- ~ Makes small to large amounts of finished compost

To add fruit and vegetable trimmings

to basic compost bins, first be sure your bin is rodent resistant—it needs sides, a lid, and no holes larger than 1/4". Second, always bury food into the compost pile (exposed food can attract pests). No more than 1/3 of your pile should be fruit and vegetable trimmings.

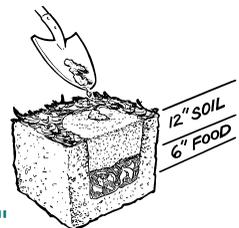


Underground Composting

- ~ Some time & effort
- ~ Requires some yard space
- ~ No harvesting necessary—enriches soil directly

Simply bury fruit and vegetable trimmings

at least one foot under the soil surface as often as you like. This means a 6" layer of compostables requires an 18" deep hole. Dig your hole in a different place each time. You can plant shallow-rooted plants (like lettuce) immediately. One to three months later you can plant deeper-rooted plants (like most shrubs and trees), or bury more compostables in the same place.



Worm Composting

- ~ Most fun! More time & effort
- ~ Very compact—indoors or out
- ~ Produces small amounts of excellent fertilizer

GETTING STARTED

1. Choose a bin.

Buy a bin, or build one out of wood, plastic, an old dresser drawer, shipping crate, or barrel.



WHAT KIND OF BIN?

Your bin needs to be 10"-16" deep, 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. The rule of thumb for bin size is two square feet of surface area per person.

An average two-person house would need a bin about 2' x 2' = 4 sq. feet, or two bins that are 1' x 2' = 2 sq. feet each.

2. Pick a place. Locate your bin where it will not freeze or overheat—in a pantry, kitchen corner, laundryroom, garage, basement, patio, deck, or in your garden.

3. Make a worm bed. Worms like to live under lots of moist paper or leaves. This helps keep them cool and moist, gives them fiber to eat, and prevents fruit flies from getting to the food. To make your worm bed, tear black & white newspapers into one-inch strips, fluff them up, then moisten them so they are as damp as a wrung-out sponge. Fill your bin 3/4 full with this moist "bedding." Shredded, corrugated cardboard, leaves, compost, sawdust and straw can also be added in as bedding.

Sprinkle bedding with a few handfuls of soil. Do not use glossy paper or magazines.

4. Adopt some worms. Compost worms are often called "red worms" or "red wigglers." They are different from earthworms and nightcrawlers who live underground. You can find red worms in an old compost pile, get them from a friend's worm bin, or buy them from a source listed on the back of this brochure. Start with one half to one pound, or two nice big handfuls.



5. Feed worms their first meal. Start your worms off with about a quart of fruit and vegetable trimmings (see "Do's & Don'ts" section).

Then leave them alone for a couple of weeks while they get used to their new home.



MAINTAINING YOUR WORM BIN

Feed your worms about a quart (one pound) of food scraps per square foot of surface area in your bin per week. To avoid fruit flies and odors, always bury food under the bedding. Don't dump and run!

Add fresh bedding every 1-3 months. Always keep a 4" to 6" layer of fresh bedding over the worms and food in your bin.

Keep bedding as moist as a wrung-out sponge. In a plastic bin, add dry bedding to absorb excess moisture. Wooden bins may require adding water occasionally.

HARVESTING & USING WORM COMPOST

Harvest worm compost at least once each year to keep your worms healthy. You can start harvesting 2-3 months after you set up your bin. Simply reach in and scoop out the brown crumbly compost, worms and all. You can also move the contents of your bin to one side, place fresh bedding and a handful of soil in the empty space and bury food there for a month or two. Harvest the other side after the worms have migrated to the new food and bedding.

Using worm compost will help your plants thrive by adding nutrients and humus to the soil. Sprinkle a 1/4" to 1" layer at the base of indoor or outdoor plants, or blend no more than 20% worm compost into potting mix or garden soil.

WORM-BIN TROUBLESHOOTING

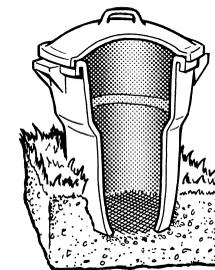
PROBLEMS	CAUSES	SOLUTIONS
Worms are dying	Food and bedding all eaten	Harvest compost, add fresh bedding and food
	Too dry	Add water until slightly damp
	Extreme temperatures	Move bin so temp. is between 40 - 80° F
Bin attracts flies and/or smells bad	Food exposed/overfeeding	Add 4"- 6" layer of bedding & stop feeding for 2-3 weeks
	Non-compostables present	Remove meat, pet feces, etc.
Sowbugs, beetles in bin	These are good for your worm compost!	

Closed-air composting

- ~ Low maintenance, some set-up time required
- ~ Prone to odor and insect problems
- ~ 3' x 3' yard space needed; two bins best
- ~ Produces small amounts of compost infrequently

GETTING STARTED

You can buy a closed-air bin or make one. Find a spot with good drainage, dig a hole and bury the bottom 12-18" of the bin. Be sure to pack the soil firmly around the edges.



FEEDING

Feed your closed-air composter no more than once or twice per week. Always close the lid firmly after feeding. Water at least once a month so the compost is always wet. Don't add dry leaves or woody prunings. If it fills up too fast, let it sit for a few weeks then feed it less. The compost reduces in volume with time.

HARVESTING & USING

When your bin gets full (after 6-10 months), let it sit for 6-10 more months before collecting the sweet smelling finished compost. While you wait, set up a second bin, or use another composting method during that time. Mix a 1" to 4" layer of finished compost into garden soil before planting, or spread it as a mulch around shrubs and trees.

PROBLEMS?

If your closed-air system smells bad or has flies and/or insect larvae, add a 4" to 6" layer of dry soil and stop feeding the bin for 4-6 weeks.

Need help? Call the Rotline 408-918-4640