



BOONE COUNTY LANDFILL

A Tradition of Environmental Excellence

Tips for Successful Back Yard Composting

Okay. You've finally made the decision to try back yard composting. So how do you go about composting your yard waste in a way that will ensure usable compost at the end of the process? It's easy - just follow the "plan" below to give yourself the best shot of establishing a trouble-free and productive compost pile:

How do I construct my compost pile/bin? In many cases, the old adage, "Simple is better" is the rule of thumb for back yard composting. Although you can build or buy as fancy a backyard compost bin as you can imagine (or afford!) - a simple wire bin and wood or metal stakes will usually satisfy your composting needs and is the least expensive alternative (see back side of this flyer.) The key is to construct a bin that is suitable for your home-site (i.e., lot size, amount of material to compost, the kind of pests you may have, and how it fits in with the rest of your lot visually.)

Round wire bins provide the most flexible pile possible. Turning your compost is easy. Just take down the bin and set it up next to your pile. Then spade or pitchfork from the old pile into the new location. What could be easier! This style of bin also provides plenty of oxygen and moisture for the composting process.

What can I put in my compost pile? Making compost is like any other type of cooking. Add the right materials in the appropriate amount and you will get the desired result - usable compost. Rather than get too technical - the best way to think of ingredients is whether they are "greens" (rich in nitrogen) or "browns" (rich in carbon.) The most trouble-free compost piles will have 50% "browns", 40% "greens" and 10% soil or previously composted material. A pile with a higher percentage of "browns" will slow down the process. A pile with more "greens" will speed up the process and requires a great deal more effort to manage properly. The back side of this flyer lists possible ingredients by their "green" or "brown" classification.

You should also be careful if you want to add food scraps to your compost pile. Food will attract other creatures - some of which you may not want to invite to your composting party!

What do I need to do to make sure the compost pile does not generate odors? This is where people get into trouble. While a compost pile can require little maintenance, it does require some care and feeding. Odors can occur due to one or both of the following: not enough oxygen and/or too many "green" ingredients (i.e., too much grass and not enough leaves.)

Ingredients should be added to the pile in layers and then mixed together through "turning." Turning is simply the process of mixing the materials like a blender. Regular turning of your compost will provide the oxygen the process needs and help evenly distribute the moisture in the pile. "Regular turning" can be anywhere from once a week to once a month. The frequency depends on how much "green" material your pile has.

When can I use my compost? The composting process can take anywhere from six months to one year depending on the level of effort you put into the process. But be careful! Even though your compost may look finished (rich and black) it may not be ready to use. Compost needs to "cure" for a little bit before it can be used. After all, the "bugs" that make compost don't know the difference between what you feed them and your plants and flowers - so give them a chance to die off before using the compost (about a month should do it.) You can tell when the process is over because the pile will no longer generate any heat.

What can I use my compost for? Compost has a number of great uses! It makes an excellent soil amendment for gardens and flower beds. Compost holds a great deal of moisture so it is excellent to use around shrubs and landscaping for plants that have a hard time in dry weather. It also makes a good insulator for plants during the colder seasons of the year.

Still have questions? Call Scott Smith at the Boone County Landfill at 433-0591. He can answer your questions or help you "trouble shoot" your compost pile!

Possible Back Yard Compost Ingredients:

"Greens"

Grass Clippings Garden Wastes
Weeds Flowers
Vegetable Wastes*
Fruit Wastes*
Compost starter additives (Nitrogen)

"Browns"

Leaves Prunings
Soil Sawdust
Chipped Brush
Ash (cooled & in small quantities)
Compost starter additives (Carbon)

** These wastes are considered food waste and may attract unwanted pests.*

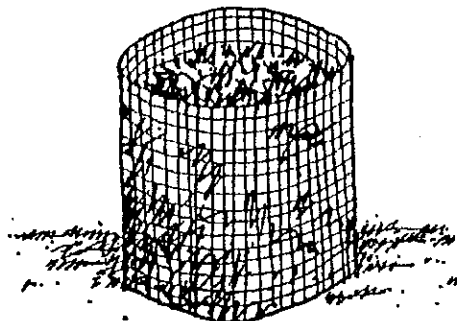
Water: Water is also a primary ingredient in compost piles. You know you have the proper amount of moisture when you squeeze the compost with your hand and it just barely drips.

Ingredients That are Not Recommended:

Red Meat Fish Dairy Products Bones Poultry Eucalyptus Plants
Rose Bushes Tomatoes and Tomato Vines Pumpkins

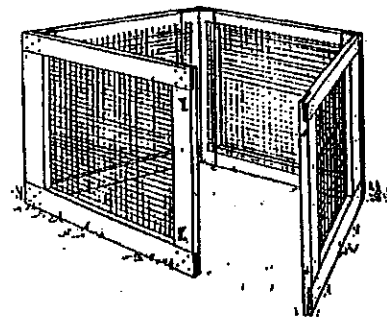
Ideas for Home-Built Compost Bins: The following are some ideas you can use to build your own back yard composting bin. There are also a number of pre-built bins available from home improvement centers and landscaping supply centers.

Basic Wire Bin:



Size: 4' high x 4' diameter.
Requires 11'-12' of chicken wire and
4 - 6 metal or wooden stakes.

The Wood and Wire Box Bin:



Size: 4' high x 4' wide x 4' deep.
Made from 2' x 4's and chicken wire.
Can also be made from garden fence.

Disclaimer: This guide is intended only to provide ideas for those individuals considering back yard composting. The Boone County Landfill makes no guarantees on the results. The responsibilities lie solely with the reader.