



Backyard Composting in Your Neighborhood

1. What is backyard composting?

Backyard composting is the process of taking household scraps and yard waste and turns it into an ecologically friendly soil amendment.

2. How is compost made?

Composting is made from organic material such as moist food scraps, shredded paper, leaves, grass clippings, wood chips, and coffee grounds into rich, organic humus - the gardener's "black gold." When moist organic resources are brought together they are converted into a microbe rich soil amendment called compost, which is beneficial to growing plants. The materials are first broken down by the smallest microorganisms such as bacteria, mites and fungi, and later by larger organisms such as earthworms, sow bugs, and millipedes.

3. What do I need for backyard composting?

Here are some helpful tips for building a successful compost pile:

- Place your compost bin in a convenient location outside at least 10 feet away from property line.
- Use a **rodent proof** compost bin with a tight fitting lid.
- Start with a thick layer of leaves, wood chips, sawdust or straw ('browns'), and add food waste, coffee grounds and grass clippings ("greens") to jump start the compost process.
- Make sure the material in your bin or pile is evenly moist and stir it occasionally to add air and restructure the mix.
- A balanced mix of greens and browns that is evenly moist and stirred occasionally will produce soil-like humus in 6-12 months.

4. What are some uses of compost?

Compost contains nutrients, but is not a substitute for fertilizers. Soils amended with compost are more capable of holding nutrients in the soil until plants have a need for them, and most often less fertilizer is needed to grow plants. Compost loosens and aerates clay soils and helps to retain water in sandy soils.

- Soil amending: Mix soils with up to 25% compost. Add two inches to the top six inches of soil each year before planting.
- Mulch: Apply two inches to the surface of soil each year to reduce weeds and water needs.
- Potting blend: Add up to 20% mature compost to container soil.
- Tea: Use one cup of excellent quality compost for every five gallons of tea brewed.



Backyard Composting in Your Neighborhood

5. Does adding bread and other food scraps to my compost draw rats?

Rats are naturally attracted to a compost bin for its food source and for potential habitat. Composting should be done in a rodent proof structure. Turn your compost regularly to ensure critters don't take up residence. Add sufficient nitrogen to keep the compost hot. This will break down food scraps quickly making them less attractive to rodents.

6. What should I do if I notice rats in my neighborhood?

Eugene Code requires all putrescible waste (such as food waste) be stored in enclosed, rat proof containers. Open compost piles could attract rodents, and in these instances these piles could be subject to nuisance abatement and are not allowed. If you need to file a nuisance complaint you can do so through an online form (<http://pdd.eugene-or.gov/CodeCompliance/ComplaintStart>), or by mail, e-mail, phone, fax, or in-person. Please provide contact information in case we have questions about your complaint, and indicate if you wish the complaint to be confidential. For questions, or more information, please call 541-682-5819.

7. Can I compost my dog manure?

Dogs and cats are not herbivores like cows, horses, and goats. Manure from omnivorous animals may carry harmful parasites that can cause disease in people. It is best bury this material in a hole in your backyard 12 inches deep, covered with 6 inches of soil, in a non-food growing area of the yard.

8. Is compost with food waste better than yard waste only compost?

Compost containing food waste can be higher in nutrients because food scraps are often higher in nitrogen than yard waste-only compost.

9. Is compost made from worms better than a hot thermal compost?

Both types of compost add to the quality of soils. Worm compost, often called vermicompost, is considered the "king" of compost because it typically has a very high beneficial microbe count. These microbes work wonders on the soil and a little bit of vermicompost goes a long way. Typically, only 10 percent of vermicompost mixed in with potting soil is needed to see a marked increase in vegetable yields.

10. Will my compost ever get too hot and cause a fire?

Most compost areas will only reach temperatures of around 90 - 140 degrees with some warmer composts reaching up to 160 degrees. It is not recommended that compost temperatures rise above 160 degrees as this may cause some of the bacteria to die. Generally, backyard compost bins are not large enough to catch fire unless something, such as smoldering briquettes, are added to ignite a flame. Never add smoldering briquettes or other potential fire starters. Larger commercial size piles of compost can dry out and become a fire hazard if the temperature gets too hot.



Backyard Composting in Your Neighborhood

11. Where can I get more information about backyard composting?

For more information about backyard composting, contact the OSU Extension Service Compost Specialist program:

<https://extension.oregonstate.edu/gardening/techniques/compost-backyard>

12. Can I put food waste into my yard debris container and have it picked up by my garbage hauler?

Yes! If you have residential garbage service, beginning October 1, 2019, you have the option to put food waste in your yard debris bin instead of the garbage. This citywide program comes after a successful three-year residential curbside food waste collection pilot program that included 1,500 households in four Eugene neighborhoods. The mixed food waste and yard debris will be turned into nutrient-rich compost by local processors. For more information about this program, please contact 541-682-5655 or visit <https://www.eugene-or.gov/3372/Residential-Food-Waste-Collection>.