

A vibrant garden scene featuring a large yellow sunflower in the center, a red flower to the left, and another red flower to the right. The background is filled with green foliage and other colorful flowers. The scene is set against a blue sky with light clouds.

# GARDEN COMPOST

*Beautiful Gardens Blossom from the Soil*

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*A Cooperative Sustainability Program of  
 Lincoln County Solid Waste District,  
 Cities of Depoe Bay, Lincoln City, Newport, Siletz, Toledo,  
 Waldport, and Yachats; Dahl Disposal Service, North Lincoln Sanitary  
 Service, and Thompson’s Sanitary Service; and Lincoln County.*



Coastal Character is the marquee and recognition of the mindful community members (*residents, businesses, and visitors alike*) who are making a difference (*locally, naturally, and sustainably*) in Lincoln County and the world around us.

# WHY COMPOST

Leaves, branches, fruits, vegetables and yard clippings do not need to be wasted. Instead, they can be composted into a rich garden soil amendment. Each year, composting helps our community divert significant tons of waste from being landfilled.

Rather than throw nutrient-rich material away, it can be made into compost! There are three core ways to turn organic materials into usable compost:

- **Curbside Mixed Compostables Roll Cart**
- **Self Haul Yard Debris to a Local Depot**
- **Home Compost Pile**



# COMPOST BASICS

## *Building Healthy Soils*

Compost is a critical ingredient for healthy soil. Compost benefits soil structure and plant growth by:

- Adding organic material into the soil, increasing biological activity, and storing critical organic nutrients.
- Promoting healthy plant growth by loosening clay soils, promoting root development, and supporting beneficial organisms which help plants to thrive and resist weeds, disease, and insects.
- Enhancing the capacity of soil to retain moisture, as well as reducing erosion and water run-off.



Healthy soil not only helps to reduce the need for fertilizers, pesticides, and water in a garden, it assists garden plants to resist pests, drought, weeds and diseases. Composting can be an important part of keeping your yard and garden vibrant and productive.

## *Applying Compost*

*Compost works best as a soil amendment.  
Do not put plants directly into 100% compost.*

- ✓ Spread compost about ½ inch deep across a garden bed as a mulch/ground cover, keeping the compost on top of the soil; or
- ✓ Spread compost about 2 inches deep and then mix, thoroughly working the compost into the soil and mixing as deeply as possible.

## ***How Compost Works***

Composting is a natural process that has been around since long before the dinosaurs. The Earth has teams of decomposers which constantly return organic nutrients back into the soil. A small pile of compost quickly becomes a miniature ecosystem with billions of microscopic organisms breaking down the materials. Depending on the conditions of the pile, such as the temperature and air flow, different teams of organisms begin to thrive.

Under the right conditions, a compost pile literally heats up from the activity of the microscopic organisms inside. The pile becomes hot and steamy. Under these conditions, organic material breaks down in a matter of weeks. In less optimal conditions, decomposition may take months or longer.



After a period of time, the nitrogen-rich fuel of compost becomes depleted, and the biological processes begin to slow. What was once a hot compost pile now begins to cool. Leaves and banana peels are no longer distinguishable. Instead, the pile is made up of dark and twiggy compost. It has a crumbly texture and a mild, earthy odor. At this point, the compost process is coming to a rest. Remove the bigger chunks (returning them to a new compost pile), and after a few weeks of aging, the compost is ready to be applied to the garden.

*Tip for Fall - freshly finished compost can be mixed directly into the soil to age over winter.*

## ***Quality Compost***

Whether you use curbside services, take materials to a depot, or compost at home, please keep in mind that what goes into the compost process ends up in garden soils and ultimately in the plants we grow.

### **Items to never place into any compost process:**

- ⊗ Plastic of any kind**
- ⊗ Plastic-like utensils, bags, and packaging labeled as biodegradable**
- ⊗ Garbage**
- ⊗ Rocks, bricks, metal**
- ⊗ Glass**
- ⊗ Any type of feces or guano**

### **Items that do not belong in a HOME compost pile:**

- ⊗ The list above; and**
- ⊗ Meats and bones**
- ⊗ Dairy, butter, and fats**
- ⊗ Breads, pastas, and rice**
- ⊗ Seed heads, weeds, invasive species**

Because home composting is typically done on a small scale, some common organic materials can become problematic if they get into the mix. Items that do not belong in home compost can cause odors, attract pests, slow the processing down, or germinate unwanted plants. Fortunately, most of the issues for home are not a problem for commercial composting processes. This means some of the items that must be kept out of home composting may be accepted in local Mixed Compostables curbside programs. *Check with your local service provider for materials accepted curbside and detailed instructions.*



## ***The Benefits of Curbside Collection to Support Home Composting***

Use curbside mixed compostables recycling collection services to keep home composting free of unwanted materials such as:

### **Seed Heads, Invasive Plant Species, and Weeds**

Many plant seeds and cuttings can survive through the entire process of a typically maintained home compost pile. The seeds and unwanted sprouts can then spread in the finished home compost. To reduce unwanted 'volunteers' in next year's garden, place undesirables (seed heads, invasive plants, weed roots, etc.) into your curbside mixed compostables roll cart instead. The hotter temperatures of commercial composting destroys these undesirables.

## **Pumpkins**

A few garden items, such as pumpkins, can have a stronger odor when they decompose. In residential areas, especially if a compost pile is upwind of a neighbor's window, items that may produce odors are good candidates for the mixed compostables roll cart.

## **Branches and Holiday Trees**

Some gardeners do not have the means to chop, grind, or shred their woody debris to about the size of thumb's width for composting. Commercial composting programs are set up to grind these materials. The curbside mixed compostables program offers a convenient outlet for holiday trees and branches up to 4 inches thick, which then need only to be cut down to lengths that fit into the roll cart.

## **Overages**

Maintaining a proper mixture of **BROWNS** (old sticks, dry brown grass, etc.) and **GREENS** (grass clippings and plant clippings) is typically the best recipe for success.

The ratio is about (4 parts **BROWNS** to 1 part **GREENS**). See "A Recipe for Success" on page 7.

Month to month garden debris has differing amounts of **BROWNS** and **GREENS**. This can create overages of one material or another. The mixed compostables roll cart serves as an outlet for garden overages.





# Home Compost

## A Recipe for Success

Home composting is like any recipe – remarkable things can be achieved when the right ingredients, time, and effort are used. A well maintained pile can turn organics into garden compost in as little as six to eight weeks. Preparation and tending are much more important than the type of bin used. Some effort in the form of chopping & turning is needed for compost pile success.

### Quick Overview

- ✓ Chop up **BROWNS** & **GREENS** (more **BROWNS** than **GREENS**)
- ✓ Keep moist (like a wrung-out sponge).
- ✓ Aerate (turn pile weekly).
- ✓ Keep pile size roughly 3 feet x 3 feet x 3 feet
- ✓ When ready - let the pile rest for several weeks

### Ingredients

4:1 ratio **BROWNS** to **GREENS**

- 4 parts **BROWNS** (old sticks, dry brown grass, wood shavings, hay, straw, etc.)
- 1 part **GREENS** (grass and plant clippings, fresh flowers, green leaves, fruits & vegetable scraps, etc.)
- Water when dry - keep pile moist like a wrung-out sponge

## Recipe for Success - Instructions

### ✓ Chop Up **BROWNS** & **GREENS**

Chopping up debris provides micro-organisms access into and around the material to begin the decomposition process. The **GREENS** act as a nitrogen-rich fuel for the composting system, while the **BROWNS** are carbon-rich and act to stabilize the process. Optimally, a compost pile will have about 4 times more **BROWNS** than **GREENS**.

### ✓ Keep Compost Pile Moist

The best conditions for decomposition come when a compost pile is constantly about the moisture of a wrung-out sponge. Water the pile when it gets dry and add dry browns if the pile gets soggy.

### ✓ Turn Compost Pile Weekly to Aerate It

The creatures in a compost pile's tiny ecosystem need to breathe. Turning the pile will supply fresh air deep down into the compost for these organisms.

### ✓ Make Pile Size 3 feet x 3 feet x 3 feet

The type of bin is less important than the size. The one cubic yard pile size is just small enough to allow some air flow into the pile, while being large enough to hold in some heat.



## **Recipe for Success - Process**

The optimum home compost pile will become quite hot all on its own. The heat is produced by all the activity of the microorganisms. An ideal temperature for a compost pile is between 90° and 140° Fahrenheit (32° and 60° Celsius). In this temperature range, organisms decompose

waste quickly and most harmful bacteria, weed seeds and fly larvae cannot survive.

Of course actual temperature of any compost pile will vary depending on size, weather, aeration, and materials.



Adjusting the recipe to meet specific needs is fairly common. For example, the pile can be turned less often; however, the composting process will be cooler, take much longer, and undesirables (such as weeds) may survive the journey. Another example is that during winter the pile can be made larger to act like a blanket which will retain more heat. The goal is to find what works best given the location, local conditions, and effort available.

## **Time for a Rest**

After several weeks, the compost will no longer look anything like the material originally put into the pile. It will have a dark and crumbly texture and have an earthy smell. This is a good indicator to stop adding new materials.

Screen out larger pieces (chicken wire or hardware cloth work well - and the screened-off pieces can go into the next compost pile). Leave the nearly finished compost in a small pile and allow it to age for about six to eight weeks. This resting period allows the decomposition process to stabilize before introducing the compost into the soil. After aging, the compost is ready to be applied in the garden.

# Troubleshooting

## Foul Odors

An ammonia-like odor is an indicator that there may be too many **GREENS** and not enough **BROWNS**. To correct, add **BROWNS** and turn the pile thoroughly.

A rotting odor is an indicator that it may have been a while since you last turned the pile and not enough air is getting inside the pile. Turn the pile thoroughly to correct.

## Checklist for continued Bad Smells

- » Ensure there are no meats, pet feces, dairy products, grease, cooking oils, or breads.
- » Ensure that it's not too wet and that there aren't too many greens.
- » Check for items that may be the source of the smell

Adding **BROWNS** along any corrective action may help with odors. **BROWNS** are carbon-rich which help absorb odors.

## Animals or Pests Attracted to Pile

- » Ensure the pile is well maintained. Turning the pile thoroughly and frequently often reduces most issues with pests.
- » Ensure the pile is not a food source by burying attracting items (such as fruits) deep into the center of pile or discontinue placing attracting items into the pile.
- » Consider adding chicken wire to enclose the pile or placing the pile into an enclosed compost container.

## **Composting Pile Unchanged in Months**

**If the pile is dry and crispy inside, the composting process will basically stop.** The tiny ecosystem needs water for the optimal decomposition process to continue. To correct, add **GREENS**, water (until moist like a wrung-out sponge), and turn the pile thoroughly.

**If the pile has mostly GREENS, it will slow composting way down and may have an ammonia-like odor.** The tiny ecosystem needs carbon for the optimum decomposition process to continue. To correct, add **BROWNS** (potentially lots of **BROWNS** to maintain a 4:1 ratio) and turn the pile thoroughly.

**If the pile has not been turned in a while, it will slow composting way down and may have rotten odor.** The tiny ecosystem needs air for the optimum decomposition process to continue. To correct, turn the pile thoroughly.

**If the pile is very small or the weather is cold, the pile will not be able to hold heat which will slow composting way down.** The tiny ecosystem needs to be warm for the optimum decomposition process to continue. To correct, ensure the pile is around 3 feet x 3 feet x 3 feet and enlarge pile during times of cold weather.

Even after a considerable delay, a compost ecosystem will quickly return to decomposition processes when optimum conditions are returned. For this reason, many people over-winter their compost pile until the warmth of spring returns.

# A Note on Safety

**Home composting** is a natural decomposition process. Remember to wash hands and take any necessary personal safety precautions when working around microbes, insects, bacterias, and molds.

AND, pay special attention to what you place into your home compost if pesticides, insecticides, or herbicides are used around your home and garden. These chemicals (whether naturally based or not) may pose significant health risks to people, pets, and the environment. Please read labels and follow all safety guidelines.



# HAULERS & DEPOTS

*Please call ahead for rates and hours of operation. The materials are taken to a commercial compost facility for processing into compost.*

## **CURBSIDE MIXED COMPOSTABLES SERVICE**

Customers with curbside *Mixed Compostables Service* may place yard debris along with food waste (fruits & vegetables, meats & bones, and dairy products) into their roll cart.

### **DAHL DISPOSAL SERVICE**

(541) 336-2932

[www.dahl Disposalservice.com](http://www.dahl Disposalservice.com)

### **NORTH LINCOLN SANITARY SERVICE**

(541) 994-5555

[www.northlincolnsanitary.com](http://www.northlincolnsanitary.com)

### **THOMPSON'S SANITARY SERVICE**

(541) 265-7249

[www.thompsonsanitary.com](http://www.thompsonsanitary.com)

## **SELF HAUL - YARD DEBRIS RECYCLING DEPOTS**

### **SCHOONER CREEK PUBLIC TRANSFER STATION**

(541) 994-5555

[www.northlincolnsanitary.com](http://www.northlincolnsanitary.com)

### **THOMPSON'S SANITARY TRANSFER STATION**

(541) 265-7249

[www.thompsonsanitary.com](http://www.thompsonsanitary.com)

### **DAHL DISPOSAL TRANSFER STATIONS**

(541) 336-2932

[www.dahl Disposalservice.com](http://www.dahl Disposalservice.com)



# More Questions About Composting?

Connect with the

**OSU Extension Lincoln County Master Gardener™ Association!**

Master Gardeners provide education to Oregonians about the art and science of growing and caring for plants. Join us at any or all of the forums listed below to be immersed in a culture of learning about sustainable, green gardening on the Oregon Coast!

**Website:** [www.orcoastmga.org](http://www.orcoastmga.org)

or

<https://extension.oregonstate.edu/mg/lincoln>

*Keep up with the latest information about gardening, classes, and round-tables. These sites are treasure troves of information for gardening aficionados!*

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/OSULincolnCountyMG>

*Like us on Facebook and keep coming back to learn about gardening on the Oregon Coast!*

## **Master Gardener Plant Clinic:**

**Tuesday and Thursday 9AM - 12 Noon**

**In-Person April - October; Remote November - March**

*Master Gardeners are on hand to provide research-based answers to all your horticultural questions with an emphasis on sustainable coastal gardening. Contact us anytime with your questions via phone messages or email. Or better yet, stop by when the plant clinic is open! We love talking gardening!*



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