

# Composting 101



Composting is the decomposition of plant remains and other once-living materials to make an earthy, dark, crumbly substance that is excellent for adding to houseplants or enriching garden soil. It is the best way to recycle your yard and kitchen wastes, and is a critical step in reducing the volume of garbage that is needlessly sent to landfills—or in the case of Sherborn, to the incinerator.

Furthermore, adding composted material to your lawn or garden improves soil properties, provides nutrients to plants, conserves water, can extend the growing season, helps to control soil erosion, and produces healthier plants which can absorb more CO<sub>2</sub> from the atmosphere thus contributing to the fight against global warming.

An average household can compost between 500 and 1,000 pounds of organic material each year in a compost bin from material that would otherwise be disposed of as trash and cost the town money.

## ***Composting is Easy***

Nature provides an army of workers--bacteria, fungi, molds, earthworms and insects who specialize in decomposing organic material. Fruit and vegetable scraps, coffee grounds, tea bags and eggshells can be composted. You can also add paper towels, tissues, wax paper and butcher paper. To keep animals and odors away, do not add meat, bones, fats, dairy foods, dog or cat litter.

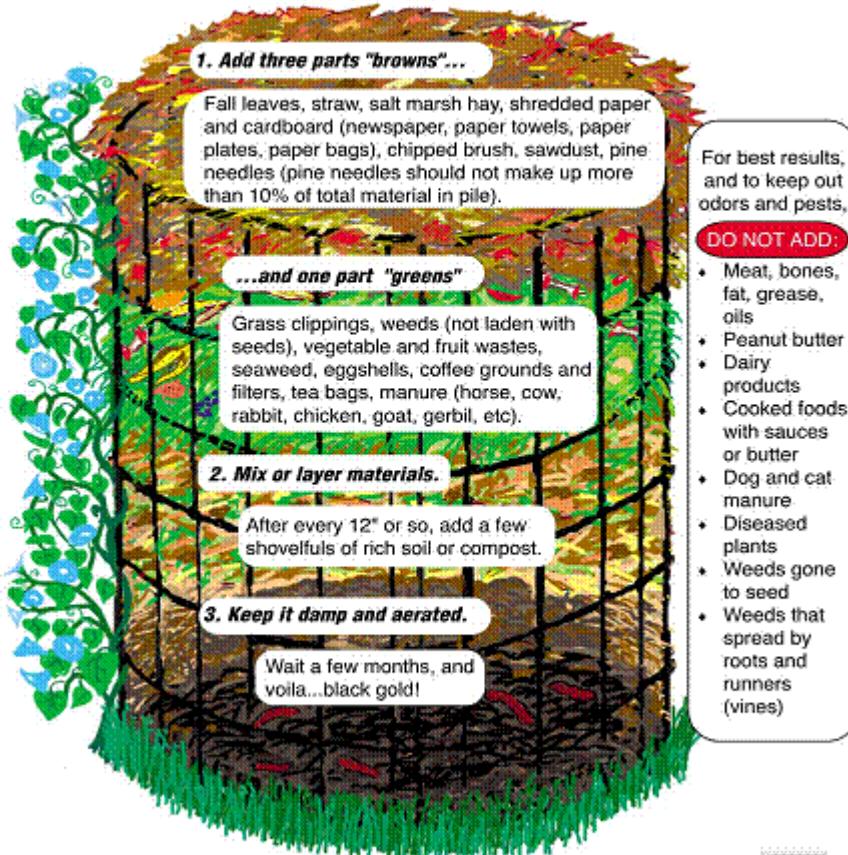
Make sure you use plenty of green and brown plant material. Brown leaves add carbon, while green, moist materials add nitrogen, both of which are needed by the bacteria in your compost pile. These bacteria also need oxygen which you can provide by building air passages into the pile with coarse material layered into it, such as wood chips, corn stalks, sunflower stalks, torn up or shredded cardboard, or even sticks or perforated pipe! You can also aerate it by turning with a shovel or pitchfork.

The bacteria also need moisture, so remember to keep it just as wet as a wrung-out sponge. It is the combination of bacteria, moisture and oxygen working together that create the heat inside the compost pile to "digest" the organic material. The outside temperature or placement in the sun or shade are not factors in the process, except if too much outdoor heat or sun

creates evaporation of the moisture inside the pile, which actually slows down the process. In this case you can sprinkle the pile with water to return the dampness to that wrung-out stage.

## Composting is easy!

To make compost, just follow these simple steps:



Prepared by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection



### ***Do It Yourself***

You can make your own composting bin out of wire, wood, concrete blocks or even garbage cans with drainage holes in the bottom. Enclosed composting bins keep out pests, hold heat and moisture in and have a neat appearance. Depending on the size of your bin and what you put into it, composting can take from 3 months to 2 years.

***Here's a good recipe for a speedier compost:***

Make your compost pile 3 feet wide and 3 feet high so it heats up quickly.

Turn your pile once a week, or poke it with a pitchfork to aerate, or build air passages with wood chips, corn stalks, sunflower stalks, torn up or shredded cardboard, even sticks or perforated pipe. Doing this often helps to speed up the process.

Keep the carbon to nitrogen ratio 30:1, in other words a mix of approximately three parts "brown" to one part "green." Carbon-rich materials include straw, dry leaves, sawdust and shredded paper. Nitrogen-rich materials include kitchen scraps, fresh yard waste and grass clippings, seaweed and alfalfa.

Keep the pile moist like a damp sponge.

Shredded debris and food scraps break down faster, sometimes even adding moisture to the mix.

***Earth Machine and New Age Composter Compost Bins***

To make it even easier to compost kitchen scraps and yard waste, the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection makes home composting bins available to towns each year.



There have been two styles of compost bins available to Sherborn residents; currently the Earth Machine composter is in stock; previously the somewhat less-convenient New Age Composter was offered (we still have a couple left) - both are shown below. Both types are easily

assembled, rodent-resistant, and allow for efficient aerobic composting. Not only that, but the bins are also made from at least 50% post-consumer recycled plastic collected or processed in Massachusetts.

The Earth Machine Composter costs \$45. Bins may be purchased from any of the attendants at the Hap Ruane Recycling Center.

For further information on home composting, contact Charles Tyler by phone at 508-653-3457 (leave a message).

For even more great information about composting, visit [Green America](#).

Scan the QR code to visit the [Sherborn Recycling Committee Website](#) for more information:

