

## Compost Troubleshooting & Resources

Need more information on how to use a worm bin? Want ideas on building a compost bin? Are you having problems in your compost pile (foul odors, cold piles, pests, etc.) and need some advice? Contact your local Master Composters program for assistance or visit <http://gardening.wsu.edu/compost-and-mulch/> for more in depth publications on composting topics.



## Composting and the Environment

Home composting reduces the flow of waste to landfills or burn piles and produces valuable organic matter for the soil at the same time. These benefits are the same whether we compost in worm bins, carefully tended hot piles, or in neglected slow piles. Home composting is a simple, yet effective way to improve our communities and the environment.

For more information about composting, becoming a Master Composter, or having Master Composters share their expertise with your organization, contact :

**Clallam County Extension Office**  
**223 East 4<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 15**  
**Port Angeles, WA 98362**  
**(360) 417-2279**

<http://ext100.wsu.edu/clallam/>

Reasonable accommodations will be made for persons with disabilities and special needs, please contact the office for arrangements. Extension programs and employment are available to all without discrimination. Evidence of noncompliance may be reported through your local Extension office.

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**WSU Extension**  
**Clallam County**

# Composting Basics



**WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY**  
 **CLALLAM COUNTY EXTENSION**

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## COMPOST HAPPENS

Composting harnesses the natural process of decomposition to return organic materials like food and yard waste into a soil amendment. Our yard, garden and food waste account for nearly 20% of the total trash thrown away each year. Instead of tossing these valuable resources, turn them into compost!

### How does composting work and what are the benefits?

Worms, bugs, bacteria and fungi feed on your compost pile and break down the materials. It is how nature recycles and returns nutrients back to the soil for new growth! Compost improves soil structure, increases soil's ability to hold water, and stimulates healthy roots. Work it into your garden soil or spread around the base of plants.

### What kind of bin or room do I need to make compost?

Choose what works for you and your space. While a bin may contain compost neatly, compost can also be made in an open pile or row, a worm bin, or by simply burying food scraps in your garden. When setting up a compost system, consider:

- ✓ Is it adequate for the amount of organic material you produce?
- ✓ Convenient to use and harvest finished compost?
- ✓ Do you need a system that is animal or rodent proof?

## Here are some important elements to consider for successful composting.

### MOISTURE

Moisture levels in the pile should be similar to a damp sponge at all times. Piles may need to be sheltered from rain or watered to keep proper moisture levels.

### INGREDIENTS

Quality compost is made from both materials containing nitrogen (greens) and carbon (browns). Mix these together as you add them to the pile. Think about stockpiling browns such as leaves for a year-round supply. Here are some things you can compost, and things you should leave out:

<b>GREEN</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ Veggie &amp; Fruit peels</li><li>✓ Grass clippings</li><li>✓ Coffee grounds</li><li>✓ Green plant cuttings</li><li>✓ Annual weeds</li><li>✓ Food Scraps</li></ul>
<b>BROWN</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ Leaves</li><li>✓ Hay &amp; Straw</li><li>✓ Paper &amp; Cardboard</li><li>✓ Woody prunings</li><li>✓ Eggshells</li><li>✓ Tea bags</li><li>✓ Sawdust</li></ul>
<b>LEAVE OUT</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ Meats, dairy or fats</li><li>✓ Diseased or noxious plants</li><li>✓ Weeds with seed heads</li><li>✓ Pet feces</li></ul>

### AIR

The organisms doing the decomposing need air to survive and work. Lack of oxygen may cause a bad smell. Turn the compost regularly to keep it aerated and add enough dry browns to balance wet materials.

### SURFACE AREA

Smaller, uniform particles decompose faster. Chop or shred larger materials; use a lawn mower or shredder if you have one. With small particles in a sufficient amount (1 cubic yard), you may notice the compost "cooking" as the action of the organisms in your pile generate significant heat.

### LET IT ROT

Give the pile time to decompose. Start a new one in the meantime. Harvest the compost to use on your yard or garden when it looks dark, crumbly, and smells like rich earth.

### USING COMPOST

The best part about compost is the benefit it provides for your garden and plants. Mix compost with the soil to add organic matter, or use it as a mulch or top dressing for plants.

