



# SCHOOL COMPOSTING GUIDELINES

*This document provides District schools with proper composting practices and safety recommendations.*

## Why compost?

- Composting is the decomposition of organic waste such as food or plant material by microbes (bacteria and fungi) or earthworms (vermiculture). The end result of composting is decayed organic matter called *humus*. Humus is fantastic to use in your garden to help keep your plants healthy.
- According to the [EPA](#), “food scraps and yard waste currently make up 20 to 30 percent of what we throw away. Making compost sends less material to incinerators and keeps materials out of the landfill where they take up space and release methane, a potent greenhouse gas.”

## What do you need to get started?

- Your school must first purchase a compost bin that has been approved by the [Environmental and Conservation Services Department](#). Bins must be a minimum of 3' x 3' x 3'. Be sure your compost bin has a tightly secured lid. Bins should be placed on top of a hard surface, such as a concrete paver, to deter rodents.
- Your compost needs three basic things: food, water and oxygen.
  - **Food:** I.e. brown and green materials will help to create a balance in your compost for decomposition.
  - **Water:** Add enough water to make your compost moist, but not dripping wet
  - **Oxygen:** Turn compost every week to oxygenize (Most compost pile issues come from a lack of oxygen, so mix it up! You can use a rake or a stick to mix. **\*\*Students should not turn compost.\*\***)

## How do you compost?

- Start by alternating brown and green materials in your compost bin. Brown materials include paper, cardboard, dead leaves, branches and twigs. Green materials include vegetable and fruit scraps, coffee grounds and grass. Brown materials are a source of carbon for your compost and green materials are a source of nitrogen.
- To help speed up the decomposition, particle size should be less than 2-3 inches.
- You should have about 50% brown and 50% green materials in your compost bin.



## Important safety tips:

- Do not add meat, dairy or pet waste to your compost bin.
- Do not add food scraps from people who are ill to your compost bin.
- Practice good personal hygiene. Students and staff should always wear gloves (disposable are recommended) when handling compost. Wash hands with soap and water after use.
- To limit exposure to dusty compost, lightly saturate compost with water before use.
- If possible, allow school garden compost to age for at least one (1) year before use. This will ensure the compost stays hot enough for long enough to kill off pathogens.
- Avoid handling compost if you have a weakened or compromised immune system. Individuals with open cuts or abrasions should avoid handling compost.
- When turning your compost, wear a respirator mask to avoid inhalation of airborne particles and gases.
- Composters must be brought inside by school staff and safely stored during tropical weather events, unless properly anchored to the ground. Your *School Support Operations Leader* can provide specifics.

For more details on compost safety, please read [Cornell Waste Management Institute's Health & Safety Guidance for Composting in the School Setting](#).



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## Frequently Asked Questions:

- My compost smells, what should I do?
  - Sometimes too many “greens” can throw off the balance of your compost. Try adding more brown material.
- My compost pile won't heat up, what should I do?
  - Check and see if your pile has enough moisture—if not, add some water. If it is adequately watered and still won't heat up, add new material on top, or turn it.
- My compost pile has bugs in it, what do I do?
  - Most compost piles will have insects and they won't harm your compost—in fact they're actually helping to break it down. Before using, spread the compost in a thin layer on a tarp in direct sunlight and leave there to dry. The bugs will leave quickly and you'll be left with bug-free compost!
- How do I get started?
  - Contact your school's Area Manager to get a compost bin installed at your school! The Area Manager is well versed with regard to the specific guidelines, policies and procedures put forth by the District as it relates to projects taking place on the school grounds.

## List of compostable and non-compostable items:

YES	NO
◦Fruits and vegetables	•Coal or charcoal ash
◦Eggshells	•Dairy products (e.g., butter, milk, sour cream, yogurt)
◦Coffee grounds and filters	•Diseased or insect-ridden plants
◦Tea bags	•Fats, grease, lard, or oils (including salad dressing)
◦Nut shells	•Meat, Eggs or fish bones and scraps
◦Shredded newspaper	•Pet wastes (e.g., dog or cat feces, soiled cat litter)
◦Cardboard	•Yard trimmings treated with chemical pesticides
◦Paper	
◦Yard trimmings	
◦Grass clippings	
◦Houseplants	
◦Hay and straw	
◦Leaves	
◦Sawdust	
◦Wood chips	
◦Cotton and Wool Rags	
◦Dryer & vacuum cleaner lint	
◦Hair and fur	

Source:

<https://www.epa.gov/recycle/composting-home>

## Educational Resources

CVSWMD Organics: [Do the Rot Thing: A Teacher's Guide to Compost Activities](#)  
 Life Lab: [Composting lesson Resources and Videos](#)  
 Palm Beach County School District: [Garden Development Guide](#)  
 University of Florida/IFAS Extension: [Composting Quiz](#)

