

# HOME COMPOSTING: REAP A HEAP OF BENEFITS

## MICHIGAN'S COMPOSTING LAW

Prior to 1995, leaves and grass comprised over 30% of all household solid waste going to landfills and incinerators. Not only is that a lot of space being filled by a clean resource, but yard clippings in landfills may contribute to methane gas and leachate production which may pollute the air and local water supplies. The moisture in yard waste causes it to burn poorly in incinerators, raising pollution levels, and operating costs. Because of the many problems caused by yard clippings in landfills, starting in 1995, yard clippings were banned from Michigan landfills. Yard clippings are defined as leaves, grass clippings, vegetable or other garden debris, shrubbery, or brush or tree trimmings, less than 4 feet in length and 2 inches in diameter, that can be converted to compost humus.

## A BURNING ISSUE

Another popular method of leaf and brush disposal, backyard burning, pollutes the air, creates a fire hazard, and is a nuisance to neighbors. Since 1995, Michigan's solid waste regulations have prohibited the open burning of grass clippings and leaves in municipalities having a population of 7,500 or more, unless the local governing body has specifically enacted an ordinance authorizing it. For a cleaner, safer alternative to burning your yard waste, try composting!

## WHY COMPOST?

The best method for getting rid of yard clippings is also the easiest. Composting is nature's way of turning your yard clippings into a valuable soil conditioner.

**Saves you money** by reducing the need for expensive bags and commercial soil additives.

**Helps your garden and lawn** by improving the fertility and health of your soil.

**Saves water** by helping the soil hold moisture and reducing water runoff.

**Benefits the environment** by recycling valuable organic resources and extending the lives of our landfills.

## COMPOSTING MADE SIMPLE

**Tools:** All you need are some basic gardening tools, like a pitchfork, a rake, and a shovel.

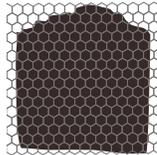
**Materials:** Compost bins can be built with inexpensive materials like snow fencing, woven or chicken wire, or used cinder blocks and lumber.

**Soil:** One inch of soil from your yard or garden has all the ingredients needed to start the composting process.

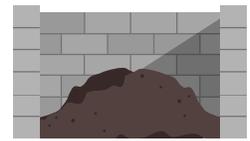
## COMPOSTING BINS



**Snow Fence Bin:** Buy a length of prefabricated snow fence and fasten 2x4s to each corner to form a square. For a 4' x 4' x 4' compost pile, purchase 16 feet of snow fencing.



**Woven Wire Bin:** Purchase a length of woven wire or chicken wire and fasten the ends with several small chain snaps (available at any hardware store) to make a circle. To calculate the length of wire needed, lay a piece of string around the outside of the pile and measure it. For a 4' x 4' x 4' compost pile, purchase 16 feet of woven or chicken wire.



**Block or Brick Bin:** Pile up bricks, cement blocks, or rocks to form three sides of a square container. Lay the blocks without mortar, leaving spaces between to let air circulate.

## WHAT CAN YOU COMPOST?

### Do Compost

- ✓ Grass Clippings
- ✓ Leaves
- ✓ Weeds & Garden Debris
- ✓ Small brush, twigs
- ✓ Clean wood ash
- ✓ Sawdust and wood chips
- ✓ Egg shells
- ✓ Coffee grounds
- ✓ Food Waste

### Don't Compost

- ✗ Whole branches, logs
- ✗ Pet or human waste
- ✗ Charcoal briquette ash
- ✗ Sawdust from treated wood
- ✗ Meat or dairy

# COMPOSTING RECIPES

**Green yard waste:** grass clippings, green yard trimmings, and weeds.

**Brown yard waste:** leaves, small brush and twigs (1/2" diameter or less), woody plant prunings, and sawdust.

## FAST COMPOST

**Ingredients:**

Green and brown yard waste, water as needed.

**Directions:**

- Mix one part green yard waste with two parts brown to form a pile (an average size is 4' x 4' x 4'). For fast composting, chop it up first with a hoe or lawn mower.
- Mix in one inch of soil.
- Keep the pile as moist as a wrung-out sponge.
- Turn the pile every week to let it air dry.
- Finished compost will take between four weeks and one year, depending on how often you turn it and how well you maintain the moisture of the pile.

## SLOW COMPOST

**Ingredients:**

Green and brown yard waste, water as needed.

**Directions:**

- In a heap or bin, layer yard waste as it accumulates. For faster composting, chop it up first with a hoe or lawn mower.
- Keep the pile as moist as a wrung-out sponge.
- In a year to 18 months, the materials at the bottom and center of the pile will be dark, crumbly compost. Sift, and use the uncomposted material to start a new batch.

# USES FOR FINISHED COMPOST

Compost is ready to harvest when it is reduced to a crumbly, sweet smelling material called humus. If some pieces are not decomposed, you can sift those out and use them to start a new batch. Compost improves soil structure, holds in moisture and plant nutrients, and promotes strong, healthy root systems for plant growth. Here are the most common ways to use compost:

**Mix it into Soil**

- Mix 3-6 inches of compost into lawn soil before seeding for grass.
- Mix 3-6 inches of compost into garden soil before planting.
- Mix compost into the soil of exposed sloping areas to help fight erosion.

**Use it as Mulch**

- Add compost as a mulch around flowers, shrubs, and trees to discourage weeds, help soil retain moisture, and protect roots from alternate freezing and thawing during winter months.

# TROUBLESHOOTING

Symptoms	Problems	Solutions
Bad Odor	Not enough air, or too much green material	Mix the pile, and/or add in more brown material
Composts too slowly	Not enough water	Moisten and mix pile
Pile is damp and warm only in the center	Pile is too small	Collect more material and mix it into the pile
Pile is damp and sweet-smelling but no heat	Lack of green material	Mix in more green material like fresh grass clippings, yard trimmings, and weeds
Fruit Flies	Too much food waste or grass clippings	Mix the pile, add in more brown material to top layer

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