Waste Reduction

BACKYARD COMPOSTING



Why Compost?

There are many benefits of composting in your backyard: it reduces the amount of waste headed to our landfills; it creates a highly fertile growing medium for FREE; it reduces erosion, soil compaction, cracking, splattering, and the need for water; weed seeds and fly larvae are killed through the composting.

Can I compost in the mountains?

Compost happens, even at high altitude. But, it takes some work to create compost quickly in our arid, cool mountain climate.

The basics still apply:

1. Add "green stuff"
2. Add "brown stuff"
3. Mix well
4. Check moisture and add water as needed.

What is green stuff?

Fruit & veggie scraps (cores, peels, ends., etc.); rotten fruits, veggies & breads; coffee grounds & tea bags (filters & bags included); egg shells; manure; grass clippings; flowers & more!

What is brown stuff?

Paperboard, dead leaves, hay/straw, sawdust, dryer lint, hair, newspaper, unbleached paper towels & more!

What to avoid in backyard compost?

Pet wastes, diseased plants, noxious weeds, meat and bones, dairy products.

Where can I find compost bins?

All Summit County residents can purchase compost bins specially selected for our mountain climate with a $15 discount at www.composters.com/summitcounty. Or, contact us at 668-5703 for info on annual bin sales.

Where can I find more information?

Each summer, we host a series of Backyard Composting Workshops, call us for details or see our website. Additionally, we host the **Master Mountain Composter Program** each spring/summer. This six-week intensive course trains experts who will help other composters. Call for details.

High Country Conservation Center is a nonprofit 501(c)3 organization dedicated to promoting practical solutions to waste reduction and resource conservation for our mountain community.

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MORE TIPS for BACKYARD COMPOSTING in the MOUNTAINS

Composting in a cold weather climate?

It may take a little longer, but not much. A compost pile that freezes will begin composting again upon thawing and typically will decompose quickly, as the cells in the material have been broken by ice crystals, giving it a jump start on decomposition.

If you would rather keep the pile active all winter, you can prevent freezing :

- Insulate the sides of the bin with straw bales or foam board
- Add a lid of plywood to keep the snow off of the pile
- Stir it often during the cold months (this will keep it hot)

Add "hot" wastes, such as: horse manure, fruit pulp (free at juice bars), lobster/crab shells, and seaweed.

Some helpful guidelines for composting:

Anyone can compost, but following the below guidelines will bring success a little faster.

Mixing - Mixing compost weekly can produce finished compost in 2-3 months in our area. Not mixing will take about 2 years to produce finished compost. Choose which best fits your lifestyle, and keep in mind that kitchen scraps (green stuff) always need to be mixed with brown stuff, not just placed on top of the pile, or pests may be attracted to you compost.

Provide air - make sure that your bin is vented. Lack of air will cause decomposition to be performed by anaerobic bacteria, which stink and decompose waste very slowly. This is another reason to mix your pile (it adds air pockets).

Check moisture levels - Your pile should be as moist as a wrung out sponge– not dripping wet, but moist.

Too much water will cause your compost to lose nutrients and could create anaerobic conditions so the pile will stink and work slowly. **Too little water** will cause the good microorganisms to go dormant and decomposition will be very slow. .

Proper pile size - The size of the pile is very flexible. Generally the pile should be between 3'x3'x3' and 5'x5'x5'. But there are ways around this. If the pile is less than 3' square it will be harder to reach the high temperatures, so mixing becomes more important and the bin should be insulated using foam board, straw bales, or some other insulator. If a pile must be larger than 5' square consider using a windrow system (a pile that is only 3' tall and 3' wide, but as long as you want), start a 2nd pile, or plan to mix more often, which at more than 5' tall will be quite an undertaking.

Chop, Shred & Tear - To increase the surface area available to microorganisms chop up the items you place in the pile. Be sure to not over do it– if everything is chopped up into very tiny pieces it is hard to keep air pockets in the pile, forcing the pile into stinky & slow anaerobic decomposition.

Pile Location - If possible keep the pile out of direct sun and high winds, which will dry it out. Keep it close to a water source for convenience. Be sure that the area has good drainage (you don't want the pile to sit in standing water). Keep in mind: ***Compost piles will break down wood and trees, do not place it against a building or over exposed tree roots!***