

# Turn over a new leaf

## Compost for healthy soil



### What is compost?

Compost is decomposed organic matter. It is dark, crumbly, and earthy-smelling and is formed as part of the earth's biological cycle of growth and decay. Plants grow by capturing energy from the sun, carbon dioxide from the air, and nutrients and water from the soil. When plants die, they become raw materials for the composting or decay process.

### The value of compost

Compost enriches soil, and healthy soil provides many benefits to your plants and the environment.

If you have a garden, lawn, trees, shrubs, or even planter boxes, you can make and use compost. Compost reduces yard and kitchen scrap waste, which in King County makes up over 25% of the average person's garbage.

Making and using compost is a key component of the five steps to natural yard care.

- 1 Build healthy soil (with compost and mulch).
- 2 Plant right for your site.
- 3 Practice smart watering.
- 4 Think twice before using pesticides.
- 5 Practice natural lawn care.

By working with nature in your yard, you can have a great looking landscape that's easier to care for and healthier for families, pets, wildlife and our great Northwest environment.

### Recycle your yard waste by composting

#### Compost bin or backyard pile?

Choose an open pile or a bin. An open pile can be the easiest way to compost if you choose to let the pile sit and compost at its own rate. Composting in a covered bin keeps the composting material neatly contained and keeps in moisture more than an open pile. Be sure your covered bin is easy to move and rodent resistant. Place the bin or pile where it is easily accessible to you and your garden hose, and out of direct sunlight.

#### Want to buy a compost bin?

King County residents can buy a compost bin at a reduced price. Visit <http://composters.com/kingcounty>.

#### How long does it take to make to compost?

It can take from six months to two years, depending on conditions such as the amount of moisture and air, size and mix of materials and whether your bin is covered. Chopping or shredding wastes and keeping the

**MORE INSIDE** 

### Healthy soil acts like a:



**sponge.** It soaks up excess rainwater and slows runoff.



**spigot.** It releases water to plants as they need it, even between rainfalls.



**filter.** It traps urban pollutants like oil, metals, and pesticides as water percolates through it.



**supermarket.** It supplies valuable nutrients to plants.



## Five Steps to: Natural Yard Care



Build healthy soil



Plant right for your site



Practice smart watering



Think twice before using pesticides



Practice natural lawn care



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Department of  
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contents moist like a wrung out sponge will speed the composting process. In addition, turning the pile frequently with a pitchfork to mix ingredients provides air to the pile which helps the decomposition process.

### Compost ingredients

Anything growing in your yard is potential food for tiny microbes and larger organisms such as millipedes and earthworms that act as decomposers. Carbon and nitrogen from the cells of dead plants and microbes fuel the decomposers' activities. Generally, brown materials such as fallen leaves and sawdust are high in carbon, while green materials such as grass clippings and weeds are high in nitrogen. As you toss together the yard waste in your composting pile or bin, strive for a mix of two parts carbon to one part nitrogen for the ideal composting mixture.

### What about weeds?

Some seeds, roots and stem fragments can survive the composting process. If you don't want it in your finished compost – don't put it in your compost bin or pile.



# Turn over a new leaf

### Now that it's done, how can I use my compost?

Compost can be used in a variety of ways:

**As a mulch** - spread a layer around trees and shrubs to prevent soil erosion, suppress weeds and reduce the need to water.

**As a nutrient source** - add to your flower and vegetable gardens, house plants, and planter boxes.

**As a top dressing for lawns** - sprinkle a thin layer over your lawn

in the spring and fall.

**Note:** When planting, do not place plants in pure compost. It's too rich in nutrients. Use compost to amend and improve the soil instead.

### How much compost should I use?

Measure your planting area or lawn and consult with a nursery professional to determine the quantity of compost appropriate to your site. Sandy soil may require more compost than clay soil.

Yard waste	
Yes	No
<b>Greens (Nitrogen)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grass clippings</li> <li>• Garden trimmings</li> <li>• Floral clippings</li> <li>• House plants and potting mix</li> </ul>	<b>Treated Yard Waste</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clippings recently treated with "weed and feed" products or other herbicide</li> <li>• Moss treated with moss killer</li> </ul>
<b>Browns (Carbon)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Twigs and stalks</li> <li>• Deciduous leaves</li> <li>• Straw</li> <li>• Coarse untreated wood</li> <li>• Sawdust or shavings</li> <li>• Shredded paper, cardboard</li> </ul>	<b>Diseased Plants</b>
	<b>Tenacious Or Noxious Weeds</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Morning glory</li> <li>• Dandelions</li> <li>• Weed seeds</li> </ul>
	<b>Thorny Plants</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Roses</li> <li>• Blackberries</li> </ul>
	<b>Evergreens/waxy Coated Plants</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ivy</li> <li>• Rhododendrons</li> <li>• Evergreen needles and laurel</li> </ul>
	<b>Kitchen Scraps (Use A Worm Bin)</b>
	<b>Pet Feces</b>

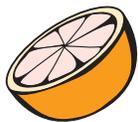
## Yard waste compost troubleshooting

Symptom	Potential cause	Solutions
Smells like rotten eggs or garbage.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pile is too wet</li> <li>• Food or pet waste in pile</li> </ul>	Turn pile and add leaves, straw, shredded newspaper.
Pile is dry inside.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not enough water</li> <li>• Too much woody material</li> <li>• Pile is too small</li> </ul>	Turn and moisten pile. Mix in fresh greens. Chop or remove excess woody material.
Pile is damp inside, but not composting.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of greens</li> </ul>	Mix in fresh greens. Chop or remove excess woody material.
Pile has shrunk, but looks undecomposed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outside of pile is dry, but most of pile is probably composted</li> </ul>	Check inside the pile and remove any finished compost. Add materials to start a new batch of compost.
Smells like ammonia; clumps of slimy grass are present.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Too much fresh grass</li> </ul>	Leave clippings on lawn, or mix in brown leaves and straw to the compost pile or bin.

# Compost for healthy soil



## Composting kitchen scraps



Composting kitchen scraps creates high-quality compost to enrich your soil and it reduces waste.

### There are two ways to compost kitchen scraps:

**Burying method** – Shred any large food pieces, then bury the material at least eight inches below the surface of the ground to avoid problems with rodents, dogs, flies and odors. The covered holes become usable garden space the following season.

**Worm bin method** – A worm bin is a sturdy box made of wood or plastic that has a tight-fitting lid to keep pests out, ventilation holes to provide adequate air circulation, and drainage holes to release excess moisture.

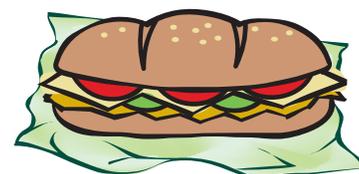
To compost in a worm bin, you need these things:

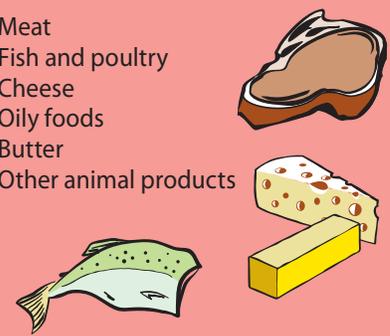
- worm bin
- redworms, also known as red wigglers
- bedding (pre-moistened shredded cardboard, non-waxy brown leaves or shredded newspaper)
- kitchen scraps

For information about worm composting, go to [www.metrokc.gov/dnrp/swd/composting/kitchenwaste.asp](http://www.metrokc.gov/dnrp/swd/composting/kitchenwaste.asp) or refer to the book *Worms Eat My Garbage* by Mary Applehof.

## Other yard waste management options

You also can choose to sign up for curbside yard waste collection. In almost 50 percent of King County neighborhoods, food waste along with shredded paper, food soiled papers such as pizza boxes, and fast food paper can be collected in the yard waste bin. Visit the King County Solid Waste Division website at <http://www.metrokc.gov/dnrp/swd/garbage-recycling/yardwaste.asp> for information about how to sign up for curbside yard waste collection.



Kitchen scraps	
Yes	No
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Vegetable scraps</li><li>• Grains and pasta</li><li>• Fruit rinds and peels (not citrus)</li><li>• Breads and cereals</li><li>• Coffee grounds and filters</li><li>• Tea bags</li><li>• Eggshells</li><li>• Paper napkins</li></ul> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Meat</li><li>• Fish and poultry</li><li>• Cheese</li><li>• Oily foods</li><li>• Butter</li><li>• Other animal products</li></ul> 

## Resources

Visit the **King County Solid Waste Division website** at [www.metrokc.gov/soils](http://www.metrokc.gov/soils) for more information on composting, soil building, and healthy yards.

**Northwest Natural Yard Days**, with its spring and fall retail sales, helps you use environmentally preferable yard care products. Visit [www.yard-days.com](http://www.yard-days.com) to learn more about this retail sales program.

Call the Natural Lawn & Garden Hotline for free advice on gardening, composting and other resource conservation topics at 206-633-0224 or call the King County Solid Waste Division at 206-296-4466, Toll free 1-800-325-6165, ext. 6-4466; 711 (TTY) King County Solid Waste Division website: [www.metrokc.gov/dnrp/swd](http://www.metrokc.gov/dnrp/swd)

**Yard Talk**, now airing on King County television (KCTV), is the natural gardening show that demonstrates how to easily care for yards and gardens in a way that's good for people, pets, and the environment. Visit the website to view episodes <http://dnr.metrokc.gov/wlr/pi/yardtalk>



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This material will be provided in alternate formats upon  
request by contacting:

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