

# Hey! Compost Happens!

## WHAT IS COMPOSTING?

Composting is a natural process where organic materials decompose and are recycled into a dark, crumbly, earth-smelling soil conditioner known as compost.

## WHY SHOULD I COMPOST?

### COMPOSTING BENEFITS YOUR SOIL AND PLANTS

- ✗ Improves soil structure and tilth
- ✗ Increases aeration and water holding capacity
- ✗ Improves soil fertility
- ✗ Stimulates healthy root development
- ✗ Aids in erosion control
- ✗ Promotes beneficial microbial activity

### COMPOSTING HELPS THE ENVIRONMENT

- ✗ Reduces the volume of vegetable material going to landfills, transfer stations and incinerators

### COMPOSTING CAN SAVE MONEY

- ✗ Reduces garbage collection and landfill fees
- ✗ Reduces fertilizer and water use
- ✗ Reduces the need for soil and plant amendments

## DON'T BAG ... COMPOST!

## YOU HAVE THE INGREDIENTS

### GREENS (Nitrogen)

Vegetable scraps  
Fruit scraps  
Flowers  
Grass clippings  
Coffee grounds w/ filters

### BROWNS (Carbon)

Chopped twigs & branches  
Sawdust & wood chips  
Dry leaves  
Straw

## DO NOT PUT INTO YOUR PILE



- ✗ Foods with grease or oil residues
- ✗ Diseased or insect-infested plants
- ✗ Meat scraps or bones
- ✗ Weed seed heads
- ✗ Dog or cat feces

### What is the Composting Process?

Producing compost is easy. Organic materials (see list above) are piled together. Decomposition occurs through the digestion of these materials by soil microorganisms. This produces heat in the pile. The compost is ready to use when everything in the pile is brown and crumbly, individual components are no longer identifiable, and the pile's internal temperature drops. The original organic materials decompose into a relatively stable material called humus or compost.

## USES FOR COMPOST

- ✗ **MULCH:** Spread compost around plants to smother weeds, keep plant roots moist, and prevent soil erosion.
- ✗ **SOIL CONDITIONER:** Before planting, mix 1 to 3 inches of compost into vegetable and flower beds to build or maintain organic matter.
- ✗ **POTTING MIX:** Make your own mix by using equal parts of compost and sand or soil. Make sure compost is fully decomposed and screened.

### Slow Harvest: Ready in 18 to 36 months.

- ✗ Add layers of yard waste over several months.
- ✗ Place compost pile where it will get rain.
- ✗ Put yard and kitchen waste in the pile as it is generated. The material at the bottom and in the center will compost first.

### Fast Harvest: Ready in 2 to 6 months.

- ✗ Mix equal **weights** (not amounts) of greens and browns at once.
- ✗ Cut materials into small pieces.
- ✗ Add water to moisten pile throughout.
- ✗ Turn pile at least once a week. Less often in cold weather.

## KEYS TO GOOD COMPOSTING

**Nutrients:** The microorganisms in the compost pile need both carbon (browns) and nitrogen (greens) to survive and to accomplish a biological breakdown of organic material.

**Water:** The microorganisms in the pile need water to survive. Water is added to the pile until it is as moist as a wrung-out sponge. Don't let the pile dry out completely or get too wet. You can cover it with a tarp.

**Aeration:** To speed decomposition, turn the pile every week or so with a pitchfork. This provides the microorganisms with enough oxygen to thrive so they can heat up the compost. Minimal turning would be at least once per month and less frequently in the winter. Placing branches at the bottom of the pile will add air to the pile.

**Bin Size & Surface Area:** Good working sizes for bins range from 3' x 3' to 5' x 5'. Also, the more surface area the microorganisms have to work on, the faster the pile will decompose. Therefore, chopping materials into small pieces will break them down more rapidly and give the finished compost a more uniform look.

*If life gives you lemons or leaves---compost them.*

## TROUBLESHOOTING

Here's how to solve problems, should they occur.

SYMPTOM	PROBLEM	SOLUTION
<b>Pile has rotten odor</b>	Not enough air and Excess moisture	Turn pile  Add dry material, like leaves/straw
<b>Pile has ammonia odor</b>	Too many high nitrogen materials (greens)	Add high carbon materials (browns) like leaves/straw
<b>Pile is dry</b>	Not enough water or Too much woody material	Turn and moisten  Add fresh greens
<b>Low pile temperature</b>	Pile is too small or Insufficient moisture or Poor ventilation or Lack of nitrogen	Add materials  Add water  Turn pile  Mix in high nitrogen materials (greens)
	or Cold weather	Insulate pile with a layer of straw or cover with tarp
<b>Pests (Raccoons, rats, insects)</b>	Presence of meat or fatty food scraps	Remove scraps from pile

### Still having trouble?

Call (609) 989-6853

Rutgers Master Gardener  
Volunteer Helpline

## MERCER EDUCATIONAL GARDENS

located at:

431A Federal City Road  
Pennington, NJ

Adjacent to the Mercer County Stables

near Rosedale Park

Self-guided tours

Educational programs



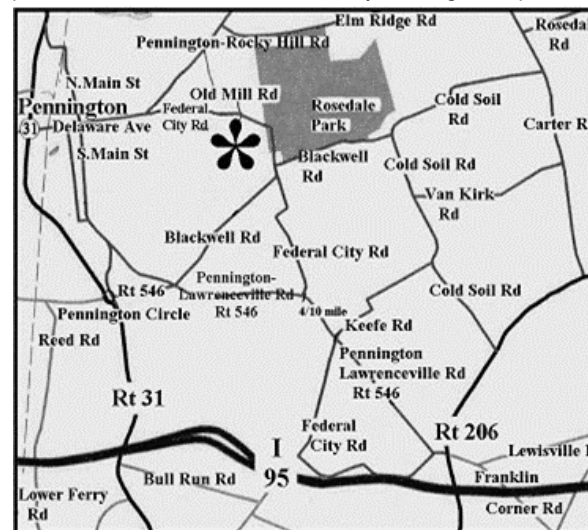
Visit the Mercer County Home Compost Demonstration Site and Gardens to learn about composting.

Open weekdays 7am-8pm and weekends 7am-5pm, this educational facility provides self-guided tours to teach backyard composting techniques to the residents of Mercer County. The site features a large variety of home-built and manufactured composters. These composters are maintained by the Rutgers Master Gardeners of Mercer County. Some bins can be purchased, but many can be made at home with common materials.

Teaching gardens are also located at this site. These gardens demonstrate the benefits of using compost, display a selection of locally-appropriate plant materials, and help teach good horticultural practices.

## Mercer Educational Gardens (MEG)

provides education on environmentally sound garden practices



### Limited Handicapped Accessibility

### For more information on composting:

Rutgers Master Gardeners of Mercer County  
Rutgers Cooperative Extension  
1440 Parkside Avenue  
Ewing, NJ 08638  
609-989-6830

Rutgers Master Gardener Helpline  
609-989-6853

WEBSITE

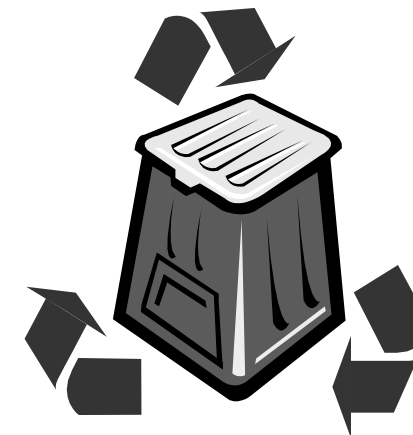
<http://www.mgofmc.org>



Brian M. Hughes, Mercer County Executive  
Aaron T. Watson, Executive Director,  
Mercer County Park Commission  
Dr. Brian Schilling, Director, Cooperative Extension  
Chad Ripberger, County Extension Department Head



# BACK YARD COMPOSTING



Anyone Can  
Compost

—  
Here's How!