

How do I troubleshoot if things are not perfect?

| Concern | Possible Causes | Solution |
|--|--|--|
| The compost has a bad odor. | Not enough air, excess moisture and/or too compacted | Turn pile. Add dry material like leaves and wood chips if the pile is too wet. |
| The center is dry. (very common in New Mexico) | Not enough water. | Water each layer as you turn the pile. Cover pile with carpet scrap, plastic sheet, etc. |
| Low pile temperature. | Pile is too small. (less than 3'x3'x3') | Collect more materials & mix the new with the old. Insulate sides. |
| The heap is damp and sweet smelling, but doesn't heat up.* | Lack of nitrogen. | Add fresh grass clippings, manure, food scraps or nitrogen fertilizer. |
| The heap smells like ammonia. | Too much grass or other high nitrogen material. | Turn it to aerate, add dry leaves or wood chips. |
| Pests in the pile. | Rotting food wastes attract pests. | Dig hole and bury new food wastes deeper in compost pile. Turn pile more often. |

* Heat generation is not necessary, especially if you are using composting redworms.

An excellent resource for backyard composters is www.mastercomposter.com.



What is vermicomposting?

Adding “Redworms” speeds up the compost process about 3 times and requires less turning of the pile. (“Redworms” are not earthworms or fishing worms, however they are inexpensive and readily available.) Redworm vendors/retailers can be located at www.recyclenewmexico.com.

How long before I'll have compost?

Frequently turning your compost pile can yield finished compost in several weeks. Piles turned less frequently may take as long as a year to produce finished compost, so get some exercise and turn your pile.

What does compost look like when it's ready?

Finished compost usually settles toward the bottom of the pile and resembles a dark, rich, sweet smelling soil. Separate compost from the rest of the coarse material with any 1/4” screen.

How do I apply my compost?

Till in or top dress approximately 1” of the compost around garden or landscaping plants, bushes or trees. Apply as far out as the stems or branches extend. You can also mix it in with your house plant potting soils.

Although it is not a total solution to the solid waste problem, volume reduction clearly provides many opportunities to deal more efficiently and effectively with solid waste disposal. As existing landfill space is used up, disposal costs will climb. By reducing the volume of our waste through composting, we will conserve natural resources and at the same time reduce existing pressures on New Mexico's landfill disposal capacity.

We would like to thank the following for their contributions:

Bernalillo County
Cooperative Extension Service
New Mexico State University

Master Composters of Albuquerque

Plant Science Department
Cooperative Extension Service
New Mexico State University

For more composting information:

www.mastercomposter.com

Also, visit the New Mexico Recycling Coalition web site at

www.recyclenewmexico.com

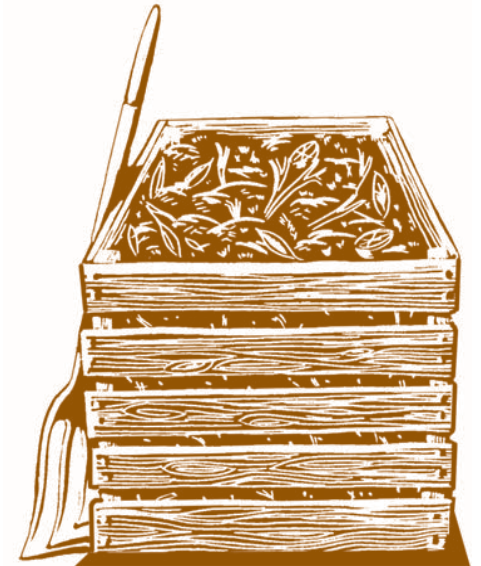


This brochure is printed on recycled paper, naturally.
2006

New Mexico Environment Department
 Solid Waste Bureau
 1190 St. Francis Drive
 P.O. Box 26110
 Santa Fe, New Mexico 87502



BACKYARD COMPOSTING MADE EASY



New Mexico Environment Department
Solid Waste Bureau
1190 St. Francis Drive
P.O. Box 26110
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87502
(505) 827-0197



What is composting?

Composting is recycling organic materials such as lawn clippings, vegetable scraps, leaves and other wastes into a rich soil amendment/conditioner.

Why compost?

You can create your own inexpensive soil amendment.



Your kitchen garbage will smell much better without kitchen food scraps.

Less food scraps go down the disposal where water is wasted and septic tanks are overworked.



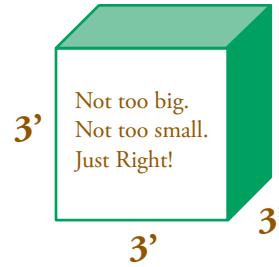
Your garden and landscaping plants will benefit from the nutrients in this soil amendment.

As opposed to most fertilizers, compost will release nitrogen over a longer time period.

Approximately 30% of the material in New Mexico landfills is yard waste and 8% is food waste, both segments of which are excellent for making compost. Instead of sending these wastes to the landfill, make them a food for your garden or trees.



What is a good size for a compost pile?

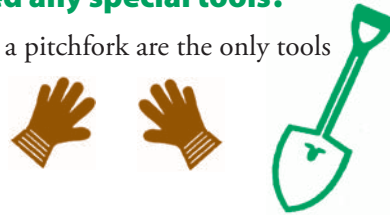


Where should I put the compost pile?

Shaded or sunny areas are acceptable locations, however, always cover the pile with a carpet scrap or a large plastic garbage bag to seal in moisture. The reason for most compost failures in New Mexico is that they are too dry. A nearby water source (faucet or garden hose) is a good idea to ensure your pile stays moist.

Will I need any special tools?

A shovel or a pitchfork are the only tools needed!



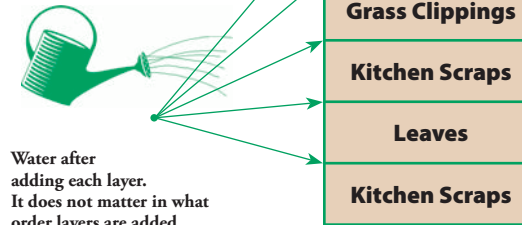
Some basic rules:

Turn the pile approximately every 2-3 weeks to speed up the breakdown of materials. When turning or transferring compost to a new bin, wet each successive layer (approximately every 6" layer). This ensures that the compost is also moist in the center of the pile. Squeeze compost in your hand to judge moisture content. If the material feels like a damp sponge, its moisture content is sufficient.



I know the materials in my pile will be mixed up eventually, but how do I add them at first?

Layers should be approximately 6". However, it may not be possible to have 6" of ingredients such as kitchen scraps. In that case, simply add as much as you can.



What can I put in the compost pile?



Add these:

Leaves, tree clippings (shredded), grass clippings, vegetable scraps, fruit wastes, coffee grounds (with filter), livestock manure (except pig), rabbit manure, paper, paper towels, *weeds.

Do not add these:

Meat, bones, diseased plants, fat, oils, pet manure (cat or dog), milk or cheese (dairy products), **wood ashes.

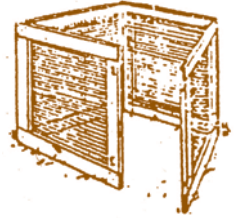
* If you are concerned about weed seeds, place the weeds in a black plastic bag in the sun for a day or two. The high temperature will kill the seeds.

** Wood ashes are alkaline and increase the alkalinity of our already too alkaline soils.



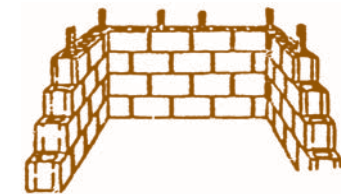
Easy materials to use for constructing your bin (if you choose not to buy a commercial bin):

Wood frame with hardware screen



Four shipping pallets on end, wired together

8 straw bales (stacked 2 high) arranged in a square (no nails, no screws, no wire)



Concrete Blocks

Wire fencing - approx. 10 linear ft. for a 3' diameter



Compost heap



Slatted multi-bin