



# COMPOSTING BASICS

creating a greener, cleaner environment

## Composting transforms organic waste to rich, earthy soil

### IT'S EARTH FRIENDLY

Almost 25% of American household waste is composed of food scraps or yard waste. This means that 59 million tons of the materials in our landfills could have been composted instead. Composting saves landfill space, saves resources and returns valuable material to productive use.

### IT ENRICHES SOILS

Compost helps improve soil structure, increases the soil's ability to hold water and air, enhances soil fertility and stimulates healthy root development.

### IT HELPS PREVENT POLLUTION

When organic materials are landfilled, they produce methane, a greenhouse gas 21 times more powerful than carbon dioxide.

Composting these materials means they don't go to the landfill and are put to work in farms and gardens instead.

### IT'S EASY

Composting can be as easy as you want to make it. For an easy compost pile, just layer green and brown wastes.

## COMPOSTING Q & A

**Q:** Can I compost my pet waste?

**A:** Pet wastes from cats, dogs and other pets contain pathogens that can be transmitted to humans. Most home composting operations don't reach the temperatures needed to destroy them. Manure from plant-eating animals, such as horses, rabbits, goats or other animals can be safely composted in a hot pile.

**Q:** How long will it take to produce usable compost?

**A:** Depending on which method you choose, composting can take anywhere from 3–18 months. Chopping or shredding compostable materials into smaller pieces and turning the pile regularly (about once per week) will speed up the process.

**Q:** Will my compost stink?

**A:** Compost should smell like soil. Always bury food waste in the pile to prevent odor and keep away pests. If your compost is smelly, that's a sign that it needs more air. Turn the pile regularly to promote breakdown and aerate the pile.

**Q:** What happens to my compost during the winter?

**A:** The composting process produces heat as a byproduct, which means that many compost piles will stay warm and keep working well after temperatures dip below freezing. In a cold Wisconsin winter, though, most home compost piles will eventually

slow down or freeze. Don't worry; composting will start again as spring sets in. To keep composting throughout the winter, you can use a covered pile bin. Tip: make a hole in the compost pile before it freezes and keep a container of dry browns nearby. Put your food scraps in the hole and cover with a couple of inches of the browns.

**Q:** How often should I turn my compost?

**A:** You can turn your compost as often or as little as you would like. Easy compost can be turned often or not at all. Hot piles should be turned about once a week.

In general, turning compost on a regular weekly schedule will help produce finished compost more quickly.

**Q:** How will I know when my compost is ready to be used?

**A:** Completed compost is dark brown, crumbly, and has an earthy odor. You should not see any of the original materials in completed compost.

**Q:** What can I do with finished compost?

**A:** Compost can be added to lawns and gardens as a soil amendment to improve soil structure and health. Compost can also be used as mulch to reduce weeds, prevent erosion and maintain moisture.

Access more **#ScrapLikeALion** resources @ [wisconsinlions.org](http://wisconsinlions.org)