

Fort Wayne City Utilities Composting Fact Sheet



What is **Composting** ?

Composting means the controlled decay of organic material such as grass clippings, leaves, kitchen scraps, wood shavings, cardboard, and paper. Composting creates a nutrient rich fertilizer that also helps condition the soil.

There are two approaches to composting:

Cool and Easy Composting

Adding materials gradually to a bin or pile and allowing them to compost slowly with little maintenance. This approach allows compost to be ready in six months to two years.

Hot and Fast Composting

Building and actively mixing a pile to produce disease-killing temperatures. This method can yield finished compost in three to four months.

Getting Started

As a general rule of thumb begin by mixing one part “green” material such as grass clippings to three parts “brown” matter such as dry leaves.



When is Compost Ready?

Using compost before it is ready can damage plants. Undecayed “brown” materials in the soil can temporarily reduce plant-available nitrogen. Undecayed “green” materials can harbor pests and disease. Immature compost can also introduce weed seeds and root-damaging organic acids.

Compost is ready when

- it smells earthy – not sour, putrid or like ammonia
- it no longer heats up after it is turned over or wetted
- it has a crumbly texture and it looks like dark soil



Save Money and Help the Environment

Composting is a simple way to manage yard waste on your property.

In Fort Wayne yard waste makes up 13.4% of all residential garbage going to the landfill. That’s nearly 12-thousand TONS of grass clippings, leaves and other beneficial material that we pay to throw away.

The City pays over \$300,000 each year for the yard waste we send to the landfill.

Doesn’t it make more SENSE and CENTS to use yard waste to help your lawn and garden grow?

How Do I Use Compost?

Compost can be incorporated as a fertilizer into an area to be planted. Work the compost in to a depth of six inches to a foot before planting.

Compost can also be used as mulch around landscape plants.

Benefits

Soil Structure

Compost makes any soil easier to work, plant and cultivate.

Compost helps sandy soil retain water and nutrients that would normally wash right through the sand.

Compost breaks up tightly bound particles in clay or silt soil, allowing roots to spread, water to drain and air to penetrate.

Compost alters the texture and structure of all soils, increasing their resistance to erosion.

Composting particles attract and hold nutrients strongly enough to prevent them from washing out, but loosely enough so that plant roots can take them up as needed.



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Benefits

Compost contributes nutrients and beneficial life to the soil, improves soil structure and helps prevent rain water runoff that can pollute rivers and lakes.

Compost helps soil absorb and retain nutrients and moisture and protects plants from diseases and pests. Better moisture retention means less watering, allowing you to conserve water and reduce water pollution caused by runoff.

Nutrients

Compost contains micronutrients such as iron and manganese that are often absent in synthetic fertilizers.

Compost releases its nutrients slowly, over several months or years.

Soil enriched with compost retains fertilizers better than lifeless soil does. Less fertilizer runs off to pollute waterways.

Compost balances both acid and alkaline soils, bringing pH levels into the optimum range for nutrient availability.

Beneficial Soil Life

Compost bacteria break down mulch and plant debris into plant-available nutrients. Some soil bacteria also convert nitrogen from the air into a plant-available nutrient.

Beneficial insects, worms and other organisms are plentiful in compost-enriched soil; they burrow through the soil keeping it loose and well aerated.

Compost suppresses diseases and harmful pests that overrun poor, lifeless soil.



Help the Environment

Composting and Water Quality

Compost promotes healthy root growth, which decreases runoff.

Compost can reduce or eliminate your use of synthetic fertilizers.

Compost reduces the need to chemical pesticides because it contains beneficial microorganisms that protect your plants from disease and pests.

RESOURCES

www.epa.gov/compost/

eartheasy.com/grow_compost.html

www.composting101.com/

howtocompost.org/

mastercomposter.com/

Learn More

For more information about landscaping practices that can save you money and help the environment, please visit www.cityoffortwayne.org and see other fact sheets such as this one produced by the City of Fort Wayne and City Utilities or Call 311

