

## Compost & Food Waste Lesson

Here you will learn about organic material, what composting is, & how to reduce food waste.

Grass, leaves, branches, & plants from your yard are all natural, organic materials that can be composted, nature's form of "recycling."

Meat, dairy, veggie & fruit parts, bread, & other foods are natural, organic materials that can be composted, nature's form of "recycling."

What should you do with your pizza boxes? Clean pizza boxes can be recycled. Greasy, cheesy, saucy pizza boxes can be composted.

Yard & food waste are made into compost. Organic material breaks down over time with the help of bugs, worms, heat, & oxygen to form compost. This photo shows a pile of organic material before it is ground up to make compost.

It takes one year to turn organic material into compost. Materials are ground up & shaped into long rows. Each row is turned once a month to let oxygen in. Oxygen is needed for the material to break down or decompose.

This is compost! It looks like dirt or soil, but it is actually a natural fertilizer that is added to soil to make soil & plants that grow healthy.

While composting keeps food out of the landfill, the best thing to do is to eat food instead of wasting it.

There are two kinds of food waste, preventative & non-edible.

The preventative food waste is the type we are trying to make less of or reduce.

Preventative food waste is food that should have been eaten & instead was wasted, such as moldy bread, expired milk, or uneaten leftovers from dinner.

Non-edible food waste are the parts of food that we don't usually eat, such as banana peels, coffee grounds, egg shells, & meat bones. We will always have this type of food waste, & composting this waste is better for the environment than throwing it out.

Why is wasting food bad? There are a lot of resources (such as energy, water, & transportation) that go into making food. When we waste food that could have been eaten, we waste all those resources that went into making it.

Why is wasting food bad? When food waste ends up in a landfill, it makes methane, a strong greenhouse gas that is bad for the environment.

About 25% of all materials that end up in the Iowa City Landfill is wasted food. That's around 30,000 tons, which is a lot of food!

When food waste ends up in a compost pile, it makes carbon dioxide, another greenhouse gas, that is not as strong as methane. But, too much of it is bad for the environment.

So, how do you prevent food waste from forming in the first place? There are simple things you can do at the grocery store & at home to waste less. Here are some tips...

Before you head to the grocery store, "shop" your kitchen. Check your refrigerator & cupboards to see what food you have. This keeps you from buying food you already have at home.

When you shop for food at the grocery store, making a list of what food you need can keep you on track & keep you from buying food you don't need (& might waste).

Eat a meal or snack before you go to the grocery store. When you go to the store hungry, you are more likely to buy food you don't need & food that is not healthy for you, like chips & cookies.

When you bring groceries home, washing & cutting fruits/veggies right away makes it easier to eat these foods (& less likely these foods will be wasted).

Check your refrigerator & cupboards often to see what foods are close to going bad or expiring, & need to be eaten.

Want to learn more?

Reduce Food Waste: [www.icgov.org/reduce](http://www.icgov.org/reduce)

Composting: [www.icgov.org/foodwaste](http://www.icgov.org/foodwaste)