What is Composting?

- Composting is the controlled breakdown of biodegradable yard and kitchen wastes.
- Compost is generally dark in color, resembles topsoil, and makes a useful soil conditioner.
- Success in composting depends upon sufficient moisture and oxygen as well as proper amounts of carbon and nitrogen.

Recommended Compostable Materials

Yard Wastes	***Kitchen Wastes***
leaves	coffee grounds
grass clippings	tea bags
trees	raw vegetable scraps
plant/shrub trimmings	fruit skins/cores/rinds
wood chips/sawdust	corn husks
garden trimmings	

Materials that Should Not be Composted

According to the Iowa City Code, the following materials are not allowed in compost piles. These materials easily attract animals and emit odors and should be avoided:

Meat	Bones
Fats	Grease
Oils	Dairy products
Raw manure	

Choosing a Container

To prevent materials from blowing away, a container or enclosure of some sort must be used.

Examples:

- Flexible wire panels
- Bricks or cement blocks
- Wood frames
- Plastic bins
- Tumbler bins

Location of Compost Pile

Iowa City Code lists the following requirements for the placement of a compost pile:

- Should be screened from street view in a confined area no larger than 25 square feet in area.
- Should be located no less than 20 feet from a house and at least 5 feet from a property boundary line or any wood structure, excluding fences.
- Should not be located in a drainageway or in an area between a building and the street right-of-way.

Building a Compost Pile

1. Start the pile with a layer of coarse material like branches and twigs to allow air flow to the pile.

2. For a carbon source, add 6 inches of leaves and other woody materials. For a nitrogen source, add 2-3 inches of grass clippings, kitchen wastes and garden wastes. Mix these two layers to speed up decomposition and then cover with 2 inches of dirt to control odors.

3. Dampen the pile with water as new layers are added or more frequently if the weather is dry. The pile should be concave in the center to prevent runoff of water. The moisture content is sufficient when the surface of the pile glistens.

4. To speed up decomposition, mix/turn the pile once a week and periodically sprinkle it with water to keep it moist.

5. When the interior of the pile is no longer hot and the material has broken down into dark, crumbly soil, the composting is finished. This process usually takes 3-6 months.

Using Finished Compost

- When added to soil, compost improves the physical, chemical, and biological properties of the soil.
- Compost can be used as a soil supplement in:
  - ____ Flower beds
  - ____ Vegetable gardens
  - ____ Lawns
  - ____ Planting a new tree or shrub
  - ____ Seed starting mix
- Add 1-2 inches of compost to the top 6-8 inches of topsoil and mix.
- Compost can also be used as a mulch which adds nutrients and improves soil structure.
- Its main purpose is to help conserve moisture, prevent erosion and reduce weed growth.
- Apply a 3-6 inch layer of compost around the base of the plant.

FOR MORE INFORMATION
CALL 887-6160

Iowa City
Landfill & Recycling Center

Paid for in part by ECO Iowa City, a sustainability grant funded by ICMA and co-administered by the Iowa City Public Library and the Department of Public Works. For more information, see www.icpl.org or www.icgov.org/landfill.

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COMPOSTING AT HOME

A Guide to Building and Maintaining Your Own Compost Pile