

THE WHAT, WHY AND HOW TO COMPOST

This program is sponsored by the Lower Gwynedd Township Environmental Advisory Council and Lower Gwynedd Township

- Goals of today's program are to explain:
 - What is composting?
 - Why is composting important?
 - What can be composted?
 - How can you produce compost?
 - How can you use the compost you have created?
 - Northern Montgomery County Recycling Commission (NMCRC)



WHAT IS COMPOSTING?

1. Composting is a resourceful way to recycle food scraps and yard trimmings you generate at home
2. Composting is a controlled, aerobic (oxygen-required) process:
 - Microorganisms feed on the materials added to the compost during the composting process
 - Microorganisms use water to digest materials; use oxygen to breathe; use carbon and nitrogen to grow and reproduce
 - Rotting food and yard waste is converted into a valuable soil enhancer that provides nutrients and helps plants thrive

Source: <https://www.epa.gov/recycle/composting-home>



WHY COMPOST?

1. According to the EPA, food scraps and yard waste comprise more than 30% of the waste stream (landfills and trash incinerators)
2. Food and yard trim waste disposed in trash causes an increase in the size of landfills, resulting in a buildup of methane gas, a greenhouse gas emission that affects climate change
3. As compost breaks down, it delivers important nutrients into the soil that plants need (nitrogen, phosphorous, and potassium)
4. Attracts beneficial organisms to the soil and reduces the need for pesticides and fertilizers
5. Using compost can increase the soil's ability to retain water, reducing the need for irrigation
6. Compost helps prevent soil erosion

Source: <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/article/how-to-compost>
<https://www.npr.org/2020/04/07/828918397/how-to-compost-at-home>

INGREDIENTS FOR COMPOSTING

The ingredients for composting include a proper balance of the following materials:

- **Carbon-rich materials (“browns”):** include dry leaves, plant stalks, and twigs. The carbon-rich materials provide food for the microorganisms to consume and digest.
- **Nitrogen-rich materials (“greens”):** include grass clippings and food scraps. The nitrogen-rich materials heat up the pile, bin or tumbler to create ideal conditions for the materials to breakdown.
- **Water**
- **Air & Circulation**

HOME COMPOSTING OPTIONS

There are 5 different ways to compost at home (**today's program will focus on options 2-5**):

1. Backyard composting with a pile you can build yourself or purchase
1. Stationary outside compost bin
2. Outside tumblers
3. Indoor Vermicomposting (worm composting)
4. Local community-based composting programming: collects your food scraps curb-side, or has a designated location where you can drop off your food waste



Source: <https://www.epa.gov/recycle/composting-home#whatcom>

HOW TO USE COMPLETED COMPOST

1. Compost is finished when it has passed through all the phases of composting and stops producing heat
2. The end result – a dark, crumbly, earthy-smelling material often referred to as “black gold” by farmers
3. Finished compost should not look like the original organic materials. If you see big chunks or pieces of the organic matter that has not yet broken down, it’s likely not ready
4. Bigger items that generally take longer to break down – such as wood chips or corn – might still be visible
5. Compost can be mixed with potting soil and sprinkled over the surface of a garden, or can be used to replace mulch

Northern Montgomery County Recycling Commission (NMCRC)

- Lower Gwynedd Township's contracted hauler, Republic Services, provides 8 leaf/yard recycling days each year: 6 in the Fall and 2 in the Spring
- Republic Services is permitted to take the leaf/yard waste material to Barnside Composting (Schwenksville, PA), which the township contracts with through the NMCRC
- Through the township's membership in the commission, residents have access to this material through the composting agreement with Barnside
- This service is not free but residents can qualify for a discounted fee

Refer to the links below for additional information:

<https://barnsidefarm.com/>

http://northmontcorecycle.com/?page_id=615

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Composting: A Guide for Home Gardeners

<https://extension.psu.edu/home-composting-a-guide-for-home-gardeners>

Montgomery County PA Food Waste Composting

<https://www.montcopa.org/1971/Food>

Montgomery County PA Yard Waste Composting

<https://www.montcopa.org/2025/Yard-Waste>

Back to Earth Compost

<https://backtoearthcompost.com/>

EPA Composting at Home

<https://www.epa.gov/recycle/composting-home>

United States Department of Agriculture What is Composting

<https://www.usda.gov/peoples-garden/food-access/Homes-food-waste/composting>

npr WHYY PBS

<https://www.npr.org/2020/04/07/828918397/how-to-compost-at-home>

Questions?

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