

This pamphlet outlines composting basics to help you start your own backyard composting.

The Ecology Action Center offers workshops for building your own compost bins during the summer and fall seasons. Backyard compost bins are an excellent way to reduce the need for chemical fertilizers, lower your carbon footprint, and divert food waste from ending up in landfills. At backyard composting workshops, participants learn best practices for composting and receive a repurposed 55-gallon drum compost bin to take home for a small fee. For more information, call (309)-454-3169 or contact us via email. Scheduled workshops are listed on the BN Green Events Calendar and in the EAC Action News newsletter! Visit CompostBN.org to learn more!

This information was gathered from the Basics of Composting from mastercomposter.com

BN Community Composting

Want to compost but don't have space for a backyard pile? You can compost through BN Community Composting. Residents purchase a starter kit from the EAC for \$24.99 which includes a 5-gallon bucket, education materials, a 25-pack of compostable liners, and your kiosk access card. You collect your compostables and when you're ready, drop them off at one of two kiosks (one at Normandy Village off of Beech Street in Normal and at the other on the east side of AB Hatchery on Grove St. in Bloomington). The only other cost is to purchase You compostable bag refills for \$17.99 when the liners run out. The cost of the program is built into the price of these bags.

Visit BNCommunityComposting.org to learn more or get your starter kit!



202 W. College Ave
PO Box 97
Normal, IL 61761
(309) 454-3169
ecologyactioncenter.org

Composting



Find more Yard Smart recommendations at YardSmart.org

How to Compost

Find a Location for the Pile

Locate your pile at least 2 feet from any structure, and avoid building against structures like a house or fence. Worms and insects can assist you in the composting process, but you want them in the pile, not in the house.

Set up a Compost Bin (optional)

While you can just build a pile on the ground, bins help keep compost piles looking neat, retain heat and moisture, and avoid the negative effects of wind and weather. Bins also help deter pests, especially in rural areas where they are more prevalent.

If you are building a pile using the batch process for faster decomposition, follow these steps:

- Wet the ground under the pile.
- Put twigs or other larger carbon materials on the bottom of the pile to provide some aeration at the base.
- Layer the rest of your materials, alternating nitrogen and carbon layers. Add water as you go.
- End with a carbon layer.

Prepare the Materials

Ensure you have a ratio of both GREENS—nitrogen (grass, manure, vegetable and fruit scraps) and BROWNS—carbons (dry leaves, wood chips) by weight. Shred carbons that are more than 1–2" in size. One bucket of greens is equal to about 2-3 buckets of browns.

Cover the Pile (optional)

Experts disagree on whether a cover is necessary. If you live in a region that is excessively dry or excessively wet, cover the pile with a black plastic garbage bag to retain moisture or guard against rain. Always make sure to cover your greens with a layer of browns to deter pests.

Turn the Pile

Turning or stirring the pile decreases the composting time, allows all the material to be exposed to the hot center, and increases aeration, which ensures your compost is breaking down aerobically.

Monitor the Pile (optional)

Check to see that your pile becomes hot within a few days. The pile's heat should peak again after turning. Monitor moisture content—when you pick up a handful of material it should feel like a wrung-out sponge.

When Is My Compost Finished?

Finished compost will only take up 25–40% of its original space. When individual materials are no longer identifiable and the pile resembles dark rich soil, the compost is complete. It will smell sweet, woody, and earthy, and will crumble through your fingers.

From beginning to end, the composting process can take 6 weeks to 2 years depending on methods and internal temperature. Everything matters—how often the pile is turned, what materials went into the pile, the condition of the materials, moisture, adequate air, pile size, heat levels, etc. If you add materials as you get them, and don't turn or stir your pile, the material at the bottom will become compost first. You can remove compost from the bottom of the pile, use it, and then return the rest of the materials to the bin or pile to continue decomposing.