

Reducing the Impact of Wasted Food by Feeding the Soil

What is Compost?

Gardeners and farmers add compost to soil to improve its physical properties. Mature compost is a stable material with a content called humus that is dark brown or black and has a soil-like, earthy smell.

Compost is created by:

- Combining organic wastes, such as wasted food, yard trimmings, and manures, in the right ratios into piles, rows, or vessels.
- Adding bulking agents such as wood chips, as necessary to accelerate the breakdown of organic materials; and
- Allowing the finished material to fully stabilize and mature through a curing process.

Mature compost is created using high temperatures to destroy pathogens and weed seeds that natural decomposition does not destroy.

Benefits of Composting

There are a number of benefits to compost that not everyone is aware of. Some examples are listed below:

- Organic waste in landfills generates methane, a potent greenhouse gas. By composting wasted food and other organics, methane emissions are significantly reduced.
- Compost reduces and in some cases eliminates the need for chemical fertilizers.
- Compost promotes higher yields of agricultural crops.
- Compost can help aid reforestation, wetlands restoration, and habitat revitalization efforts by improving contaminated, compacted, and marginal soils.
- Compost can be used to remediate soils contaminated by hazardous waste in a cost effective manner.
- Compost can provide cost savings over conventional soil, water and air pollution remediation technologies, where applicable.
- Compost enhances water retention in soils.
- Compost provides carbon sequestration.

How to Compost at Home

There are many different ways to make a compost pile. Helpful tools include pitchforks, square-point shovels or machetes, and water hoses with a spray head. Regular mixing or turning of the compost and some water will help maintain the compost.

Backyard Composting

- Select a dry, shady spot near a water source for your compost pile or bin.
- Add brown and green materials as they are collected, making sure larger pieces are chopped or shredded.
- Moisten dry materials as they are added.
- Once your compost pile is established, mix grass clippings and green waste into the pile and bury fruit and vegetable waste under 10 inches of compost material.
- Optional: Cover top of compost with a tarp to keep it moist. When the material at the bottom is dark and rich in color, your compost is ready to use. This usually takes anywhere between two months to two years.

Indoor Composting

If you do not have space for an outdoor compost pile, you can compost materials indoors using a special type of bin, which you can buy at a local hardware store, gardening supplies store, or make yourself. Remember to tend your pile and keep track of what you throw in. A properly managed compost bin will not attract pests or rodents and will not smell bad. Your compost should be ready in two to five weeks.

Overall, composting is a nutrient rich-soil amendment, created by natural decomposition of kitchen and yard waste by microbes, worms, and other organisms when mixed with your soil, it will revitalize it, make it healthier and more productive. Help reduce your carbon footprint on the environment!

To learn more or participate in the community garden, contact Jayden Fisher at the band office. Miigwetch.