



Southeastern Oakland County Water Authority  
3910 W. Webster Road, Royal Oak, MI 48073-2761, 248-288-5150

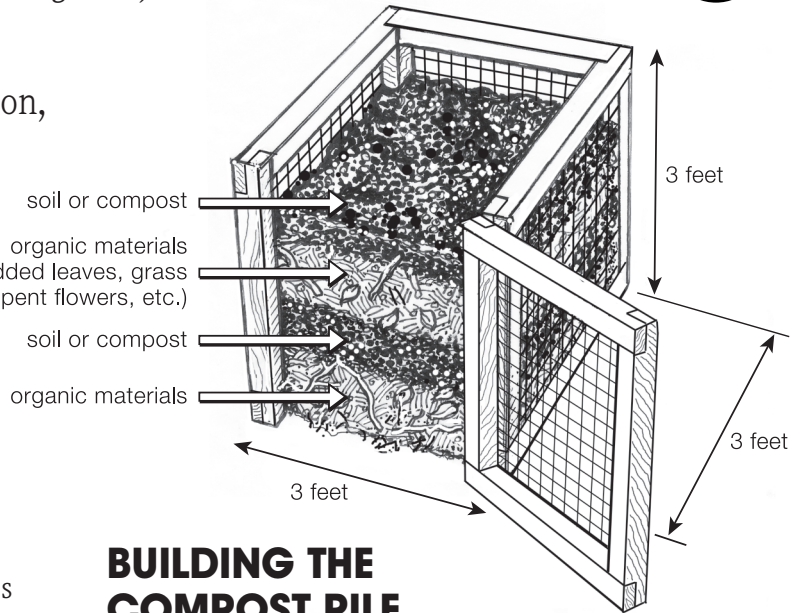
# HOME COMPOSTING

TURN YARD WASTE INTO GARDENER'S GOLD



For a 5-minute home composting video,  
see [www.socwa.org](http://www.socwa.org)

Through the natural process of decomposition, leaves, grass, and other yard clippings can be transformed into a soil-enriching substance called compost. Decomposer organisms, including bacteria, fungi, sowbugs, earthworms, beetles, and ants (among others) work together to transform yard waste into yard riches.



## MATERIALS FOR COMPOSTING

For an ideal composting mix, combine shredded leaves (50% of total volume) and grass clippings (25% of total volume) with garden soil or compost (25% of total volume). If you don't have grass clippings available, you can make excellent compost by using additional shredded leaves or other garden clippings.

YES	NO
Leaves – shredded, if possible	Dairy products
Grass clippings	Oils and fats
Spent flowers & garden clippings	Meat, fish, bones
Young weeds (without seeds)	Pet manure; cat litter
Fruit & vegetable peelings (cut small)	Cooked food with seasonings
Clean egg shells	Diseased plants
Coffee grounds, filters, & tea bags	Black walnut leaves
Old fertilizer	Bread
Shredded bark mulch; old straw	Weeds with seeds
Potting soil	Invasive weeds

To avoid nuisances, select the materials for your compost pile with care. For specific composting regulations, check with your local Department of Public Works.

Fruit and vegetable peelings should always be cut into small pieces and buried deep in the compost pile.

## BUILDING THE COMPOST PILE

1. Start with a layer of organic materials such as shredded leaves, grass, or other garden clippings – to provide microorganisms.
2. Water the layer until it is as moist as a wrung-out sponge.
3. Add a 2 to 3 inch layer of garden soil or compost – to provide microorganisms. Mix.
4. Continue layering, watering and mixing.

Build the pile to a size of 3 feet x 3 feet x 3 feet, or slightly larger, to fill the compost bin.

Plastic compost bins with lids are highly recommended, since they retain moisture and keep out animals.

## TURNING THE PILE

Turning and mixing the compost pile with a garden fork or compost turner adds oxygen and accelerates the process of decomposition. The pile may be turned once a week, once a month, several times a year, or not at all. However, if the pile is turned over and mixed from time-to-time and kept moist, finished compost is usually available within six months.

Don't worry about the temperature of the pile – either a hot or cold process yields beneficial compost.

# USING COMPOST TO BUILD HEALTHY SOIL AND PROTECT WATER QUALITY



## BENEFITS OF COMPOST

Compost is a natural organic soil amendment and fertilizer. When mixed with sandy soil, compost helps to retain and hold water. When mixed with clay soils, compost loosens the soil particles and improves drainage.

Compost is known as gardener's gold because it improves soil structure, retains water, encourages root growth,

aerates soil, releases nutrients slowly, supports beneficial microorganisms and earthworms, and suppresses some soil-borne diseases.

Compost helps protect water quality because it absorbs rainwater and filters out many pollutants.

*Composting is nature's way with waste. Why not be good to your garden?*

### USING COMPOST

#### ... in the Garden

Compost may be added to garden soil at any time. Spread compost on top of the garden in a 1 to 3 inch layer and dig it in several weeks before planting. During the growing season, use compost as a top-dressing to give your plants a healthy "snack."



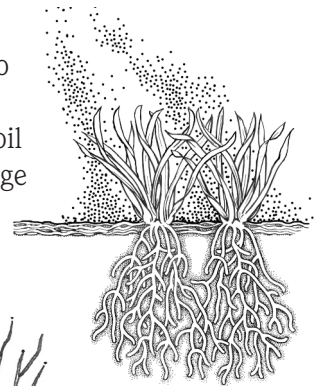
#### ...for Container Gardening



Add sifted compost to potting soil or container garden soil mixes. For best results, compost should not exceed one-third of the total amount of soil. Small amounts of compost can be sprinkled around potted plants at any time.

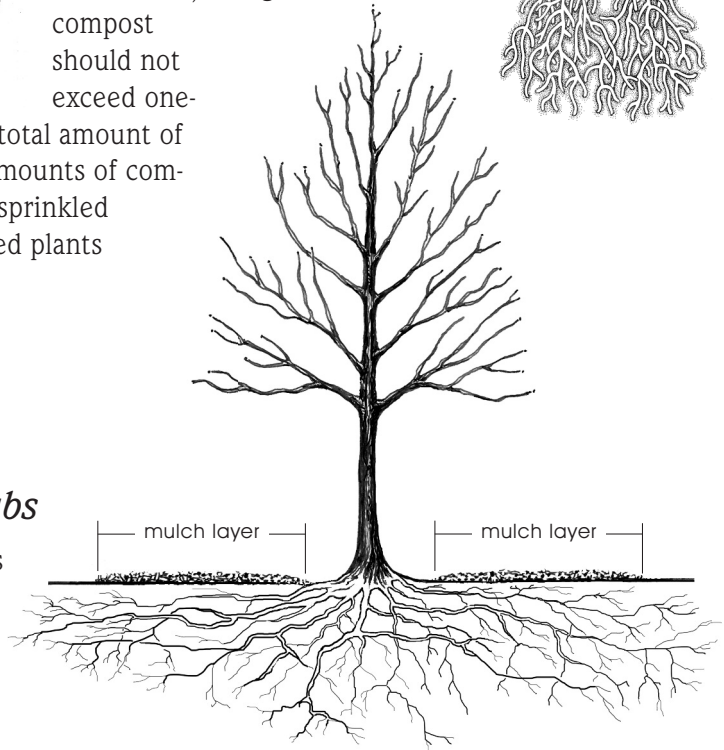
#### ... as a Top-Dressing for the Lawn

Rake sifted compost into the lawn to help build soil and encourage healthy grass.



#### ... As a Mulch Around Trees and Shrubs

Spread an inch of compost under the canopy of trees and shrubs. Compost will gradually release nutrients to delicate tree roots. Shredded bark or wood chips can be placed over the compost to reduce weeds and help hold in moisture.



2009 update funded through a grant from the Nonpoint Source Management Program, Michigan Department of Environmental Quality.

Prepared and distributed by SOCWA – Southeastern Oakland County Water Authority, 3910 W. Webster Road, Royal Oak, MI 48073-2761, 248-288-5150 [www.socwa.org](http://www.socwa.org)

Ninth printing: January 2009.

Printed on recycled paper.