

# Why compost?

Composting is the recycling of organic materials back into a useful soil product that can be used in your garden or on potted plants.

Composting can save you money and time and can reduce your garden's watering and weeding needs. It also benefits the environment by recycling valuable organic resources and extending the life of our landfills.



## Composting is easy! Compost happens no matter what you do!

Soil organisms do most of the work for you by decomposing what you put in your compost pile and recycling it into usable soil amendment.

### The 1-2-3's of easy composting

Begin your pile with grass and yard trimmings and kitchen food scraps.

- 1 Chop materials as small as possible to speed the composting process.
- 2 Add enough water so that your pile is as damp as a wrung-out sponge.
- 3 Mix dry brown materials with moist/green materials to balance nutrients, air and water. Turn materials once a week.



**Do I need a bin?** You can compost in an open pile, or build your own bin out of scrap lumber, old pallets or concrete blocks.

Do-it-yourself bin building instructions are available by calling the Environmental Hotline.

You may prefer to purchase a ready-made bin for neatness and ease of use. Bins with lids reduce odor and pest problems and are best for city neighborhoods. Plastic, wire, wooden and worm bins are available and work very well.

Residents of apartments and condominiums can compost too! Covered bucket systems and worm bins work best for small spaces.

**Environmental Hotline (805) 449-SAVE**

  
**City of Thousand Oaks**  
Public Works Department  
2100 Thousand Oaks Blvd.  
Thousand Oaks, CA 91362  
www.toaks.org

City of Thousand Oaks



**A Guide to Easy  
Home Composting**



**So, how do I compost?** Place your pile or bin in a shady location. Mix layers of brown carbon rich materials including dry grass, leaves, hay, pine needles, and sawdust with green nitrogen-rich materials such as vegetable kitchen scraps, grass clippings and horse manure. Use about 50% greens and 50% browns in your mix. Water when necessary to keep the mix damp but not soggy. After a few days, the center of the pile should be hot (up to 140°) and steamy - that's the compost process at work! Water and turn the pile with a shovel or pitchfork each week to expose all material to high heat of the center of the pile.

**When is the compost ready?** Ideal conditions of the proper bin system, good layering of greens and browns, the correct amount of moisture, adequate mixing, and high temperatures can produce compost in less than one month. However, it usually requires several months for good compost to be produced. Your compost is ready to use when it is brown, uniform in consistency, crumbly and has a sweet earthy smell. You may want to sift your compost through a screen before use.



**How do I use my compost?** Mix finished compost with garden soil and use it as a mulch on top of the soil, dig it into the soil or use as a potting mix for plants in containers.

## What can be composted?



Compost grass clippings, leaves, weeds, flowers, twigs, horse manure, vegetable and fruit food scraps (bury in your pile to discourage animal problems).

## What can't?

Do not compost cat or dog wastes, meat, bones, dairy products, greasy food, poisonous plants, diseased or pesticide-sprayed, or woody plants.

# Compost trouble-shooting

SYMPTOM	PROBLEM	SOLUTION
Pile not composting	Too dry <b>Too much "brown" or "green"</b> Not enough heat  <b>Pile too small</b>	Moisten slightly  <b>Adjust balance of "browns" and "greens"</b> Cover open pile with dark plastic tarp to raise temperatures and add "greens"  <b>Start with 1 cubic yard of material (3' all around) and add more as material volume is reduced</b>
Pile smells bad	Too wet, not enough air or too much green material	Add dry materials such as brown leaves and sawdust, and mix
<b>Pile attracts excessive amounts of flies</b>	<b>Food scraps in pile</b>	<b>Do not use food scraps or use bin with tight fitting cover or bury food scraps</b>

## Want to learn more?

**Environmental Hotline  
(805) 449-SAVE**

**City of Thousand Oaks  
Public Works Department  
(805) 449-2468  
[www.toaks.org](http://www.toaks.org)**



The City of Thousand Oaks offers free 2-hour composting workshops, discounted compost bins, compost thermometers and instruction books to City residents. Call the Environmental Hotline for information and a schedule.

If you can't seem to find the time to attend one of the City's free workshops, a one-hour video featuring "Dr. Compost" Eric Werbalowsky is available for free check-out from the Thousand Oaks Grant R. Brimhall Library (call number - 631.875). "Dr. Compost", working in costume, encourages use of the "rot" techniques of recycling yard trimmings in this very entertaining show. The video checks out for one week.

In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, if you need special assistance to read this publication, please call (805) 499-2400. Notification will enable the City to make arrangements to ensure accessibility to the information contained in this publication.

## Let worms make your compost!

Red wiggler worms (not garden earthworms) make a great addition to your compost pile, or you may "house" them in their own plastic bin or "worm farm". Worms are especially good at converting food scraps into rich "castings", which sell for as much as \$300 per cubic yard.

You can purchase a commercial worm bin or make your own. Buy a large plastic storage box, drill holes in the bottom, add bedding material such as peat moss or torn newspaper for the worms to live in, and add 1/2 pound of red wigglers. Give your new pets a week to get used to their new surroundings, and then start feeding them your kitchen food scraps. You'll need to separate worms from the castings every few months.

For more details on worm composting, where to get worms, and specifications for a home-made system, call the City's Environmental Hotline, or stop at the Thousand Oaks Grant R. Brimhall Library and check out the authoritative and humorous *Worms Eat My Garbage* by Mary Applehof.

**A 2'x2' worm box can turn  
all the food scraps from a  
two-person household  
into compost**

