

COMPOSTING:

A GREAT WAY TO REDUCE WASTE AND IMPROVE THE SOIL!

Monmouth County residents potentially could reduce waste going to the landfill by 20% through home composting. In addition, composting allows us to manufacture compost--a wonderful garden amendment. Follow these easy steps for successful composting:

Step 1: Select a location. You don't need much space--an area as small as 2x2 will be sufficient. A compost pile can be located in the sun or shade.

Step 2: Choose a composter. Although yard materials such as grass and leaves can be composted in an open pile or enclosure, it is advisable to use an enclosed bin when composting vegetative kitchen scraps. There are many types of compost bins available commercially, or you can build one yourself. Size should be approximately 1 cubic yard (3 x 3 x 3), but can be smaller or larger. The Monmouth County Recycling Office has plans on file--request a copy by calling the Recycling Hotline at 577-8400. Also the County offers Home Composters for sale at subsidized locations at the following sites: Keansburg DPW (787-0215 x 500); Deep Cut Gardens (671-6050); Spring Lake Heights DPW (449-6983); Ocean Township DPW (531-5000 x 364); Upper Freehold Twp. Municipal Building (609-758-1183).

Step 3: Fill the bin. A surprising array of materials are easy to compost: Yard waste such as grass, leaves, and weeds, kitchen scraps such as raw fruit and vegetable peelings, egg shells, tea bags and coffee grounds, and even paper products such as paper towels and boxboard. You can even add dryer lint!

Step 4: Avoid any problems. Materials should be in a 1:1 ratio of dry materials (like leaves) to wet materials (like grass and food scraps). Enough dry material will prevent any unpleasant odor. Always cover wet materials with dry materials and you will achieve the proper balance. NEVER COMPOST: meats, bones, fats, and dairy products. They are proteins and will decompose very slowly, giving off odors which may attract pests. Also avoid putting pet feces in your compost pile. Always cover fruit and vegetable scraps with leaves, straw or soil. Chopping or shredding of materials will speed decomposition.

Step 5: Maintaining a healthy, active pile. You can work a lot or a little with composting. If you want finished compost quickly, make sure the pile is moist (not damp), and turn the pile periodically. Turning it once every 10 days will get you compost in about 3 months. Turning it once a year will get you compost in 12-18 months. You choose how much work you want to do!

Step 6: Using your compost. You will know compost is finished when it looks like soil--dark and crumbly. Compost will benefit growing plants in many ways: by providing nutrients, holding moisture in the soil and improving the health of the soil. You can use finished compost in a variety of ways--add it to soil before planting vegetables or flowers, use it as mulch on any kind of plant, sprinkle it around the lawn as a top dressing, add it to flower pots or window boxes.

Local resources: For further information contact the Monmouth County Recycling Office at (732) 4317460. You can ask questions, request an information packet or to get the name and number of a local Master Composter. Other resources include books and videos at County libraries, and the Monmouth County Home Composting Demonstration Site, located at Deep Cut Gardens, Red Hill Road, Middletown (Call 671-6050 for information).