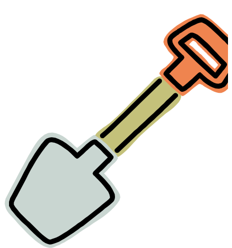
TROUBLESHOOTING:

Although composting is a fairly easy process, problems may arise from time to time. These problems will be minor and easy to correct. With just 15-30 minutes per week, you should be able to keep your pile in good condition. Listed below are some potential problems and what you need to do to correct them.

ODOR:

If your pile starts to smell like ammonia, you may have added too many green materials. You can fix this by adding some leaves, or other brown materials, and giving the pile a good turn.

If your pile starts to smell rotten, it may be either too wet or too compacted. Again, the solution is to turn the pile and add some browns.



PESTS:

If it appears that critters are visiting your compost pile, you need to do a better job of covering up the food scraps. Also remember not to include meat, fish, poultry, or dairy products. These materials attract pests.

NOTHING'S HAPPENING!

If nothing seems to be happening in your pile, it can mean a couple of things:

- **You might not be adding enough green materials—try some fruit and vegetable trimmings .**
- **Another possibility is that your pile might be too small. It should be at least 3' x 3' x 3'.**
- **Particle size may be too large—try chopping the kitchen scrapes smaller.**
- **Not enough water—try adding a bit more.**

TURNING SPOILS TO SOIL

A Simple Guide to Backyard Composting

The Town of Cumberland

Public Services

290 Tuttle Road

Cumberland, Maine 04021

207-829-2220

Why should we compost?

About 1/4—1/3 of the residential waste stream is compostable. Backyard composting is an easy way for you to recycle your food scraps and leaf & yard waste. This will help to preserve disposal capacity and reduce your town's solid waste costs.

The finished product, called compost or humus, is a nutrient-rich soil amendment that can be added to your garden. Compost will reduce the need for fertilizers, balance the pH and help the soil retain water.

Compost Happens!

Composting is a natural process that occurs everyday in nature. It is the process of organic materials decomposing, or breaking down. The process is carried out by microorganisms, worms and insects that eat the organic material.

When we compost in our backyards, we are simply speeding up what happens naturally by creating the ideal circumstances for decomposition to happen. We provide the bugs, worms and microorganisms with everything they need to survive: water, air, and the right materials to eat.

A compost pile is made up of 2 basic ingredients - carbon and nitrogen. Anything dry supplies carbon (fallen leaves, sticks, dead plants). Anything that's still green when you put it in the pile supplies nitrogen (grass clippings, weeds, etc.) Carbon takes a long time to break down. Nitrogen breaks down really fast (which is why a pile of grass clippings smells so bad!). Ideally you should have a mix.

Basic Steps of Composting:

1. You can either use a compost bin or an open pile. Just make sure you pick a fairly level spot with good drainage and equal amounts of sun & shade.

2. Add both "greens" and "browns". The ratio should be about 4 parts "browns" to one part "greens". You need to start with a pretty big pile to get the process going. Make sure to cover any food scraps with leaves.

3. Keep the pile moist, but not sopping wet. The materials should feel like a wrung out sponge. If the materials get too wet, add some leaves to suck up the moisture.

4. Provide oxygen to the pile by turning it with a pitchfork, shovel, or aerator.

5. Take it's temperature! It should get pretty close to 160 degrees F as it decomposes. Once it starts to decline, start taking the stuff on the outside of your mound and throw it onto the center top. After a few days, it should have gone through it's cycle of ~160 F. Once the pile no longer can reach those temperatures, but stays at a moderate temp. then it's ready to be used.

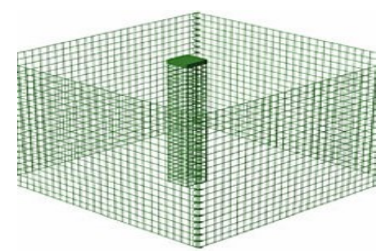
It's as easy as that!

Just keep your pile moist and aerated and keep adding more materials (in the right ratio). Your pile should heat up as the materials start to decompose. For troubleshooting advice, see the back.

Examples of Compost Bins:

The Earth Machine

Exaco Thermoquick



Pilot Complete Coated Mesh
Wire Compost Bin