

Home Composting For Busy People!

Methods For Yard Waste Reduction & Reuse

Grasscycling— Known as mulching grass clippings, you simply leave your clippings on the turf where they will quickly decompose to enrich the soil.

Mulching— Use leaves, grass, pine needles, or wood chips as a mulch. It will prevent weed growth, keep moisture in the soil, and protect against erosion.

Worm Composting— A great way to recycle organic waste from inside your home, including, fruit and vegetable scraps and houseplant prunings. Worm composting is great for apartments or condos— places where little or no yard waste is produced.

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Why Compost? Here are three important reasons-

1. Composting helps you recycle your yard waste.
2. Composting helps our county reach state mandated waste reduction goals.
3. The most important reason to compost is the production of finished compost, or “humus.” Finished compost is a valuable soil amendment that helps break up hard clay soil, giving it a more crumbly, granular texture. Compost also acts as a fertilizer placing a wide variety of micro-nutrients into the soil for your plants to use.



The “Key De-Composters”

Earthworms, springtails, sow bugs, ground beetles, mites and more!

Those are some tiny creatures you never want to hear about, but in fact, these little bugs are the key to composting! With help from fungi, these bugs are what break your waste down into compost. However, most of the work is done by organisms you can't see, primarily air-breathing (aerobic) bacteria. You will know the bacteria is doing its job though, where aerobe bacteria is active, your yard waste feels warm (even hot!) and may give off steam during the colder months.

Which Form of Composting Fits Your Schedule?

Passive

Passive composting is adding yard waste to your bin or pile and doing little to no maintenance. It is very easy to do but will prolong the time to generate compost to a year or longer.

Active

Active composting is when you actively maintain your system in the “three step method.” This will produce compost in six months or less! See reverse side for instructions.



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Composting with Worms!

Taking Care of Your Worm Bin

1.) Every few days you should add food scraps by lifting the paper layer and placing food next to the worms. Put paper back or add more if needed. Make sure to keep the shredded paper moist.

2.) Watch the “castings” grow! Castings are what the worms produce when they eat the food scraps. The castings are dark brown and look like moist coffee grounds. After 4-6 months the castings will get a few inches deep in the bottom of the bin. Time to harvest!

3.) Harvest your castings by placing food scraps in one side or corner of the bin. Wait a month while the worms move to the food. You can now pull out the moist castings, place them on a newspaper in the sun to dry.

Once dry the castings can be used as a soil amendment or top-dressing around plants. Castings are high in nutrients and plants love them!

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BUILDING YOUR WORM BIN:

- 1.) Obtain a 18-20 gallon solid color plastic bin with tight-sealing lid.
- 2.) Drill 1/4 inch holes in the upper sides of your plastic bin – four on each side and two on each end. These holes let air in & out of the bin. Do not drill holes on the bottom of your bin. You will want to collect the fluid at the bottom of your bin for a valuable nutrient to water your plants.
- 4.) Add your worms to the bottom of the bin – start with a pound of worms. Make sure they are “composting” worms! Our native worms don’t work in a worm box.
- 5.) Place food waste around or on top of the worms. Only fruit or vegetable scraps, coffee grounds, eggshells, tea bags, bread, pasta (without the sauce!), and house plant cuttings. Outside yard waste should not be added to your worm bin.
- 6.) The next step is important! Add a 3 or 4 inch layer of shredded paper. Hand shredded newspaper or office paper run through a shredder is OK. When you are done adding paper, add a small amount of water to make the paper moist, not wet.
- 7.) Put the lid back on the bin and you’re all done! Now place the bin outside in a shaded, protected location.



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Mulching

A Variety of Materials Can be Used as Mulch

Wood Chips
Shredded bark
Plastic Sheet
Rock

Green Waste Materials:

Shredded Leaves
Wood chips
Pine/ Redwood Needles
Grass Clippings
Paper

Benefits

- 1.) Using organic waste as mulch will reduce the amount of yard waste that would be thrown away. You are “recycling” this material at your home.
- 2.) Mulch works as a valuable soil conditioner. While it lays on top of the soil it will decompose and add nutrients to your soil.
- 3.) Mulch is considered another form of composting because it transforms green waste into humus as decomposition takes place.

Mulching is the simple practice of taking material and laying it over the surface of the soil. It is a traditional gardening practice that has been used for many years. Today, mulching serves a variety of important purposes in the yard and garden, including:

- **Weed Control**
- **Soil Conditioning and Moisture Retention**
- **Mud Abatement**
- **Decorative Ground Cover**



Mulching is easy and anyone can do it! The most important consideration when mulching is mulch thickness. “Settled” mulch that is 4” or thicker is unhealthy because it restricts the access of oxygen to the soil. The ability for a mulch material to settle determines how thick the mulch layer should be. For example, a 6” to 8” layer of leaves or pine needles will settle to 2” or 4”, while a 3” to 4” layer of wood chips won’t settle at all. The timing of mulching is also important. Although mulch can be applied anytime during the year, they are best used during the autumn, winter and early spring months. It is during these periods that your mulch can most protect your soil and your plants against hard freezes, erosion and spring weed growth. One concern associated with mulching is its ability to hide pests. Snails, earwigs and mice can move through the mulch, unseen by you, and nibble on your plants. The solution to this is to never mulch all the way up to stems or trunks of flowers or shrubbery. Leave a 12” gap between the edge of the mulch and the stem or trunk to avoid problems.

If you have questions about mulching or other yard waste reduction techniques, please contact the Central Contra Costa Solid Waste Authority

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