

FACT SHEET: Recycling Yard and Kitchen Waste

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One method of recycling is composting yard and kitchen waste. Composting is the controlled decomposition of organic matter. You can compost using the holding or turning methods, also known as the passive (cold) or aggressive (hot) methods. The holding method uses simple containers or open piles, small volumes, minimal maintenance, but slow composting - 12 to 24 months for finished compost.

Requirements for creating quicker composting results, the turning method, include: particle size of 2-3" (think rule or size of thumb), pile size of 3'x3'x3', proper mix of carbon and nitrogen (30:1), appropriate moisture content (like a wrung out sponge), and turning several times per week to aerate the pile.

Green materials (nitrogen) include grass clippings, herbivore manures, and kitchen scraps. Anything that once was a plant can be composted...and egg shells. Brown materials (carbon) include leaves, twigs, sawdust, newspaper, and cardboard. Do not compost meat, meat by-products, animal fat or dairy products. Bury food scraps to discourage pests and prevent odor from decomposing fruit and vegetables. In the cooler stages of the composting process, there will be cockroaches, spiders, centipedes and earthworms present. All of these help speed the decomposition process.

Finished compost can be used as a soil amendment, mulch, potting mix, or compost tea (finished or unfinished compost). You can turn your mess (leaves, twigs, pruning's, vegetable and fruit peelings, egg shells, newspapers, coffee grounds) into mulch. Mulch is a renewable resource which conserves water, suppresses weeds naturally, releases nutrients, and insulates soil temperature while beautifying your landscape. Create potting soil using this recipe: Mix 1/4 part compost, 1/4 part perlite, 1/4 part peat and 1/4 part builder's sand. To create compost tea, place compost in a burlap bag or pantyhose leg. Tie off at top. Put into bucket of water. Leave overnight. In the morning you will have compost tea with which to water your plants.

You can reduce the amount of lawn and landscaping clippings by using slow growing plants, considering the mature size of your plant selections, planting only purposeful grass for pets and recreation areas, and creating self-mulching areas. Maintaining a lawn requires a lot of manual labor, water, fertilizer, pesticides, and generates a lot of debris. Grass clippings? Love 'em and leave 'em...on your lawn. This will save you time in raking and bagging the clippings and save money on fertilizer. When you do fertilize your lawn 2-3 times per year, use slow or controlled release nitrogen. When you or your lawn service mow, the grass should be dry and the mower blade sharp. Only cut off 1/3 of the grass blade per cutting.

Pre-register to attend a composting workshop at:

<http://hillsborough.extension.ufl.edu/HomeGardening/event-calendar.html>

Visit our compost and mulch demonstration areas at the Hillsborough County Extension Office, 5339 County Road 579, Seffner, FL 33584. For assistance with horticultural questions, call: 813-744-5519. More gardening information is available at <http://hillsborough.extension.ufl.edu> and <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>

Remember to reuse, reduce and recycle.