Composting 101

What is compost?
Compost is organic material made from food scraps and green waste such as grass clippings that is used as an enriching soil amendment. Compost is an alternative to traditional soil amendments such as fertilizer and it is safe to use on edible plants. It can be made from material you already have, especially kitchen scraps.

Why is composting important?
Typically, food and other organic materials that are thrown away get mixed up with other materials at landfills and does not break down effectively. Composting organic materials takes it out of the waste stream and transforms it into a valuable resource.

Organic materials decomposing in landfills release methane gas, which is 30x more powerful than carbon dioxide in contributing to climate change.

How do I compost?
There are many ways to compost depending on your living situation.

Composting Outdoors: If you have backyard or outdoor space, you can build a compost bin or compost pile.

Collection Services: You may wish to participate in a food and yard scrap collection or drop off service. Inquire about availability with local municipalities.

Vermiculture: If you have house plants you would like to fertilize with compost, a small worm bin composter may be right for you.

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WHAT TO COMPOST?

A healthy compost pile needs a balance of green materials, which add nitrogen, and brown materials, which add carbon. The ideal green to brown ratio is 2:1.

The pile also needs air, moisture, and to be stirred twice a week.

Problem Solving
- Smelly? Too much nitrogen.
- Won’t break down? Too much carbon
- Pests? Bury food scraps into the pile

GREENS - NITROGEN

Vegetable, fruit, food scraps, bread
Coffee grounds, tea bags/leaves
Fresh grass clippings, plants, stalks, flowers
Chicken/livestock manure

BROWNS - CARBON

Nut shells, crushed eggshells
Leaves, corn stalks/cobs, shredded straw/hay
Sawdust, wood chips, twigs, wood ash
Paper: Brown bags, paper towel rolls
Cotton string/thread, wool

PROHIBITED

Meat, fish, bones, dairy products, oil
Weed seeds, diseased/insect infected plants
Glossy paper, anything with harsh chemicals
Pet manure

MORE INFORMATION

The Illinois Scrap Food Coalition provides a list of services, compost FAQs, and a support network.

www.IllinoisComposts.org
Worm Composting: go.illinois.edu/Vermiculture
go.illinois.edu/ThermalComposting
go.illinois.edu/CompostingDosDonts