

# OUTDOOR COMPOSTING

## GUIDE - HELPFUL TERMS

- **Activator:** An accelerator that can expedite the natural decomposition process. Their purpose is to increase microbial activity.
- **Aeration:** Replenishing compost with oxygen by manual or mechanical means. The most popular way to aerate a compost pile is to manually turn it over with a fork, shovel or compost turner.
- **Cloth:** this can be a burlap coffee sack or old picnic blanket
- **C/N Ratio:** The carbon-to-nitrogen ratio in a compost pile. Whether a compost pile is considered “hot” or “cold,” is largely determined by the C/N ratio. The more nitrogen present, generally the “hotter,” “greener,” or more “wet” the pile will be. Nitrogen-rich materials for compost are the kitchen wastes such as food scraps, fruits and vegetables, blood and egg shells as well as fresh lawn clippings, fertilizers and older compost. Carbon-rich materials are usually dry and “woody” such as dry leaves, sawdust, paper, teabags and coffee filters. (see table below.)
- **Cloth:** this can be a burlap coffee sack or old picnic blanket
- **"Greens" & "Browns":**

### Brown carbon-rich

- dry leaves
- straw and hay
- shrub prunings
- pine needles/cones
- chopped twigs/branches
- wood ash
- newspaper
- shredded paper (avoid glossy paper)
- cardboard (shredded)
- corn cobs, stalks
- dryer lint (from natural fibers)
- sawdust (from untreated wood)
- eggshells
- brown paper bags (shredded)

### Green nitrogen-rich

- table scraps
- fruit scraps
- vegetable scraps
- fresh grass clippings
- lawn and garden weeds (if they have not gone to seed)
- flowers
- seaweed and kelp
- chicken manure
- coffee grounds/filters
- tea leaves (loose or in bags)
- corn cobs, stalks
- hedge clippings
- garden waste
- fresh leaves

- **Humus:** Decayed organic matter usually seen as dark brown or black soil.
- **N-P-K:** Stands for Nitrogen, Phosphorus and Potassium (aka potash) the macronutrients necessary for plants to survive and grow.
- **pH:** The measure of the acidity or alkalinity of a substance or solution.
- **Topdressing:** Application of a thin layer soil mix or compost to a garden. Topdressing improves soil quality gradually as each successive layer builds upon the last.

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## YEAR-ROUND SCHEDULE

### SPRING

#### April

- Check to see if the compost pile has thawed
- When the pile has thawed, use the pitchfork to turn piles for aeration  
\*\*Make sure that supervision and rules for pitchfork use are known by students
- Assess if the compost is ready for use or should be combined for further breaking down

#### May

- Turn compost piles bi-weekly
- Separate cured compost and compost that needs to be broken down further
- Decide which bins you will be using for this year's garden scraps
- Put cured compost into separate area, or, when dry- into covered 5 gallon buckets
- Spread a thin layer (about ¼-½ inch) of cured compost on the garden beds

### SUMMER

#### June

- Turn compost piles bi-weekly
- Separate cured compost and compost that needs to be broken down further
- Cut plant clippings into workable sizes, add to correct active bin compartment
- Add 'greens' if available, covered by existing compost or 'browns' in active compartment

#### July

- Turn compost piles bi-weekly
- Cut plant clippings into workable sizes, add to correct bin compartment
- Lightly water if compost has dried out, cover with shade cloth if in direct sun
- Add 'greens' if available, covered by existing compost or 'browns' in active compartment

#### August

- Turn compost piles bi-weekly
- Cut plant clippings into workable sizes, add to correct bin compartment
- Lightly water if compost has dried out, cover with shade cloth if in direct sun
- Add 'greens' if available, covered by existing compost or 'browns' in active compartment

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## YEAR-ROUND SCHEDULE

### AUTUMN

September

- Turn compost piles bi-weekly
- Cut plant clippings into workable sizes, add to correct bin compartment
- Add 'greens' if available, covered by existing compost or 'browns' in active compartment
- Add leaves into active compartment and mix thoroughly

October

- Turn compost piles bi-weekly
- Cut plant clippings into workable sizes, add to correct bin compartment
- Add leaves into active compartment and mix thoroughly

### WINTER

November - March

Let rest, add 'greens' if thawed and available

