

Composting for Water Conservation

Reduce your water needs with compost.

Improve your soil by adding compost to flowerbeds, gardens, and the lawn. Compost provides nutrients, encourages healthy plant growth, and improves soil moisture retention.



The well managed compost piles at Will Rogers Gardens are maintained by onsite staff and divert tree limbs, grass clippings, dead plantings, and excess produce from a local food pantry from the landfill.

What is Compost?

Compost is a nutrient-rich material that forms from the breakdown of organic materials. Finished compost can be incorporated into the soil or spread on the soil surface. Compost can loosen clay soils and help sandy soils retain moisture and nutrients. When applied, compost improves the health and quality of your garden, lawn, and landscape soils.

Reduce Food Waste at Home

Did you know that an estimated 1/3 of food is wasted throughout the world? Food waste amounts to about 20 percent of what goes into municipal landfills. By composting your food scraps and spoiled produce at home, you are helping cut down on the waste that ends up in landfills. The reduction in landfill food waste can also help reduce the release of greenhouse gases that contribute to climate change.



Soils Benefit from Compost

Soil low in organic matter is a common problem for many urban lawns and gardens and can make it difficult for your plants to grow and flourish, but easy for weeds to take over. Plants grow best when water is able to slowly release into the soil, and adding compost can facilitate this.

Compost helps retain moisture in sandy soils and helps loosen soil that is compacted. Soil compaction impedes water infiltration and drainage, as well as aeration, and it makes it more difficult for plants to spread their roots, stunting their growth and limiting their ability to find water and nutrients. Compost also encourages beneficial insects, bacteria and fungi that support healthy plant growth.

Did You Know?

Each year, during the first full week in May, the Compost Foundation celebrates International Compost Awareness Week (ICAW). ICAW is designed to promote the benefits of composting and compost for effective resource management, soil health and plant growth.

To learn more visit www.compostfoundation.org.

When to Use Compost

The best time to use compost is when establishing a new lawn, flowerbed, or garden. If adding compost to existing plantings, use it as a top dressing to increase water efficiency and promote healthy plant roots.

Create Your Own Compost

Composting is very forgiving, and many different options are available, so don't feel intimidated. You can easily buy a prefabricated compost tumbler or bin from your local hardware store or online, you can build one yourself, or if you have space, start a pile.

Step 1:

Consider what compost method meets your lifestyle:

If you have some time to dedicate to your pile, you can try **active or hot composting**, which will produce ready product quickly, as the temperature of the pile hovers around 110-140°; this is the best option if you have large quantities of food waste, and it is also hot enough to kill weed seeds. However, if you need a more passive option, you can try **cold composting**, but you'll have to wait much longer for your product to finish and you won't be able to add as much food waste or any weeds with seeds, as cold piles do not reach high enough temperatures.

Step 2:

Building your compost:

A healthy compost pile requires a mix of both brown and green materials.

Browns are carbon-based:

- sticks
- dried leaves
- pine needles
- shredded paper or cardboard
- wood chips
- straw or hay

Greens are nitrogen-based:

- vegetable and fruit scraps
- grass clippings
- plant trimmings
- weeds (only in active/hot piles)
- coffee grounds

Starting a hot/active compost pile:

Lay down about 6 inches of brown materials for the bottom of the pile. Then add about 2-4 inches of green materials to the pile. Continue alternating brown and green materials until you have a pile that is at least three sq ft. in order to generate enough heat to kill weed seeds and pathogens, but your pile can be larger, keeping in mind that larger piles are more difficult to keep aerated. Alternatively, if you have this much waste, you can always just build another pile. If a pile is too small, it will not generate as much heat, and will take much longer to be ready. Feel free to add soil in between the layers. Water your pile, and make sure to keep it moist but not soggy. *Turn your pile at least once every other week to keep it aerated.* Depending on your pile activity, you may have ready compost within 30-90 days.



Starting a cold compost pile:

Pile your organic materials, burying any food waste in the middle of the pile as you go. This process may take up to a year or so to achieve usable compost.



Vermicomposting:

Another form of composting that uses worms to process food scraps and other green waste into castings. These castings, or worm poop, are full of nutrients and microorganisms and can be added to your soil to nurture your plants.

Your pile is ready when:

- It has a nice dark color
- It has no strong odors, smells earthy
- It has a topsoil, crumbly texture
- The temperature has dropped significantly, down to around 50°

Troubleshooting common compost issues:

If your pile is too moist or has a foul odor, add more brown material and make sure to turn it for aeration.

If your pile isn't getting hot or doesn't seem to be doing much, add more green material.