



Building a Compost

You're on a Quest!

What would autumn be like in northern New England without the opportunity of raking leaves? What do you do with all of those leaves? Instead of burning them, you can turn them into wonderful material that can enrich family gardens in the coming year. This activity will guide you on composting and utilizing leaves as a valuable waste resource!

Investigate with your family!

- Do you or other relatives have a garden? A lawn? Trees and shrubs? Planter boxes? These can all have a use for compost!
- What is composting? What is the right amount of air and moisture for composting?
- Why are worms important in a compost? Are there particular types of worms that are best? Why?

Materials needed:

- Fallen leaves
- Grass clippings
- Garden soil
- Shovel
- Computer with Internet access
- Pen and paper for notes

Build Your Own Compost

Step 1

Identify a location in the yard that would be good to build a compost pile. You might want to be sure there is a lid or some type of cover to protect the pile from rain and snow – and where you can control the amount of moisture, air or ventilation in the pile.

Step 2

Start with a 6-inch layer of chopped leaves set on top of soil. Add 4-inches of damp grass clippings, then add another 6-inches of damp leaves. Finish it with one-inch of garden soil.

Step 3

Before adding another layer to the pile, mix the layers of leaves to the pile. This will speed up the composting process.

Step 4

Turn the pile, adding water. You will notice that your compost will be warm (and it should reach about 110°F). After one week, using a shovel, continue to turn, moving the material on the top and sides of the pile to the center. Shovel the pile and loosen any compacted material. Let it set.

Step 5

After the second week, turn the pile again. Check the moisture in the pile. Squeeze a handful of compost and check to see if you need to add extra water.

The compost is complete when the pile cools off and is about one-third of the original volume you started with. The color will be dark, crumble in your hands, and have a soil-like odor. Record your results for each of your steps. Describe your process and determine whether you think you ended up with a rich, dark composting soil that can be used for gardens!

- Step 1 _____
- Step 2 _____
- Step 3 _____
- Step 4 _____
- Step 5 _____

Worms in my garden!

Find out which worms are best to use in composts. Do you "feed" worms? What types of food scraps might be appropriate to feed the worms? What food scraps shouldn't you use, and why? How do you avoid smell problems and flies in a compost pile?

<p>List of food scraps for worms</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<p>List of food scraps not for worms</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<p>Add worms to your compost and, after one week, describe what you find!</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
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Here are some terrific Web sites that will help you determine how to design, fill, and "feed" your compost!

Maine Department of Environmental Protection: In Our Backyard

Compost Your Soil and the Earth http://www.state.me.us/depl/iob/iob_76.htm

Cooperative Extension, Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

<http://www.ianr.unl.edu/pubs/horticulture/g810.htm>

Environmental Fact Sheet, Municipal Composting of Yard Waste

<http://www.des.state.nh.us/factsheets/sw/sw-3.htm>

Urban Agriculture Notes, published by City Farmer, Canada's Office of Urban Agriculture

Composting with Red Wiggler Worms <http://www.cityfarmer.org/wormcomp61.html>

The Green Lane, Environment Canada

Composting: Getting down to paydirt <http://www.ns.ec.gc.ca/udo/paydirt.html>



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Maine Forest Products Council

