Home Composting Basics

Bernalillo County Extension Master Composters

2018 Final Project – Karie Luidens
What is composting?

- All materials that were once living and are now dead will eventually break down.
- In nature this can take many years.
- Composting creates ideal conditions for things to break down efficiently.
- The end result is healthy humus.
What is composting?

“... once living and now dead...”

yard waste  paper products  kitchen scraps
What is composting?

“In nature this can take many years”

moisture dries up

temperatures change

decades may pass!
What is composting?

“Composting creates ideal conditions”

transformation in a year or less
What is composting?

“The end result is healthy humus”

... a perfect addition to enrich all types of soil!
Why bother composting at home?

- To help the environment
- To help your own garden
Why bother composting at home?

✧ To help the environment...

✧ Composting is recycling for carbon-based materials

✧ It preserves the carbon cycle, which keeps carbon cycling through the environment the way nature intended
Why bother composting at home?

◊ To help the environment...

◊ Composting keeps carbon-based materials out of landfills, where their fertility goes to waste and they decompose anaerobically, releasing carbon into the atmosphere as greenhouse gases.
Why bother composting at home?

◇ To help your own garden...

◇ The end-product of composting is full of nutrients that help plants thrive
Why bother composting at home?

- To help your own garden...
  - Creating your own soil amendment means you don’t need to spend money on artificial fertilizers that actually damage soil over time.
How can I start composting?

- Learn what materials are and aren’t compostable
- Learn different strategies
- Pick the strategy that fits your lifestyle
- Learn the right ratios to mix in
- Get set up and get going!
**Materials**

**Compostable**
- Plain paper products
- Plant waste: grass clippings, leaves, peels, stems, cores, pits

**Not Compostable**
- Glossy or metallic paper
- Plastic, metal, glass, dirt, stone
Materials

Compostable
- Natural fibers
  - Cotton, wool, lint

Not Compostable
- Synthetic fibers
  - Nylon, polyester, acrylic
Compostable

♦ Animal waste: Eggshells

(The moist inner membrane breaks down, while the hard shell adds bulk and mineral micronutrients)

Not Compostable

♦ Animal waste: Most materials, e.g. dairy, meat, bones, fur, feces

(These materials do break down, but they tend to smell, attract pests, and/or transmit disease)
Strategies

Hot Composting

◊ Follows a specific formula to generate lots of internal heat
◊ Minimum 3' x 3' x 3' space
◊ Requires regular maintenance
◊ Breaks down materials rapidly

Cold Composting

◊ All other methods are “cold”
◊ Different strategies can be adapted to different amounts of space, levels of physical ability, and degrees of maintenance
◊ Often takes longer
All setups need the same basic ingredients:

- Compostable materials: mix about 50% "green" / "brown"
- Water: keep everything damp (the biggest issue here in the desert)
- Oxygen: ensure air flow with "bulking material" (sticks, pine cones, etc.)
“Life finds a way...”

Don’t worry TOO much about ratios.

There’s no wrong way to compost.

As long as everything stays damp, it WILL eventually break down, it just might take longer.
Attend our specialized workshops to learn more about specific composting strategies, like vermiculture or bucket composting

Look online and at the library for more resources

Any questions?

Thanks for coming and good luck!