

Curious About Composting? We're here to help!

By: GROW Ecological Commission



Actions You Can Take

Reduce food waste –
compost to contribute to a
healthy environment!

Why compost?

- Food waste is the largest contributor to landfills in the United States. Here in Illinois, it accounts for 20% of waste in our landfills. This waste releases methane, a harmful greenhouse gas that traps heat in the atmosphere and contributes to rising temperatures (Source: Illinois EPA). Composting keeps food waste out of landfills, thus reducing harmful greenhouse gas emissions. Compost creates healthy soil that builds strong plants (Source: Feeding America).

What is composting?

- Composting is a natural process which breaks down organic material (food, leaves, cardboard, etc.) into healthy soil.

How to get started?

- First things first is to reduce food waste. Plan out meals so as not to buy more than you need, learn the best ways to store food to maximize freshness, make the most of your foods (use stems, greens, etc. in your cooking), and use leftovers. Reducing food waste also saves you money!
- Interested in starting your own compost? Here are steps to get going:
 - Keep a bowl or compost collector on your kitchen counter to collect food scraps
 - Vegetable and fruit scraps, coffee and tea grounds, eggshells, unbleached coffee filters, and pieces of cardboard are examples of what to collect
 - Removing seeds from tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, etc. during food prep, helps keep them from sprouting in your compost
 - Purchase or construct an outdoor compost bin. Layer in food scraps from your kitchen, chemical-free grass clippings and leaves, and torn up pieces of cardboard. The key to composting is maintaining the right wet to dry ratio, so layering in cardboard or paper scraps helps with this ratio.
 - What not to put in a home compost: meat, bones, dairy, grease, onions, citrus peels, labels from fruits and vegetables
 - Stir the bin/compost regularly to produce heat and move the decomposition process along (you might also need to add water when it's warm out). Stirring every 3-4 days is ideal; the more frequently it's turned the faster the decomposition process.
 - Finished compost will look like healthy soil, dark brown or black. Use this in garden beds and spread on the lawn to provide natural nutrients to the soil.



Look for GROW's table throughout the community the week of May 4-10, International Composting Awareness Week, to learn more and see a composting demonstration.

Not interested in handling the entire compost process? Our new waste management company, **SBC Waste Solutions**, offers **compost pick up**. An Organics Waste cart is available for rental at the following rates: \$12 (35-gal), \$14 (65-gal), or \$16 (95-gal) per month. Service is available April through December. Participants can then request the final compost product from SBC at no additional charge. Call SBC at (312) 522-1115 to sign-up.

Spring Cleaning Can Wait—Nature's Not Ready

You may be tempted to "spring" into action cleaning up and mowing your yard after a long winter, but consider delaying these chores through April. Delaying spring cleanup gives overwintering insects, like native bees, fireflies, and butterflies, time to safely emerge from leaf litter and hollow stems. Holding off on mowing through April allows early-blooming plants like dandelions and clover to provide essential nectar and pollen for pollinators just coming out of hibernation. These small actions help sustain vital insect populations that support biodiversity and healthy ecosystems.

Recipe of the Month

There are so many yummy ways to reduce food waste. Chop up herb stems and use them in soup (add them early to give them time to soften up); sauté beet greens, chard stems, and the like with oil, garlic, salt, or your favorite spices; make a soup/broth with leftover veggies; the possibilities are endless. This classic minestrone allows for adding any leftover veggies, beans, pasta, whatever you'd like. Enjoy!

Classic Minestrone Soup

Ingredients

4 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, divided
1 medium yellow onion, chopped
2 medium carrots, peeled and chopped
2 medium ribs celery, chopped
¼ cup tomato paste
2 cups chopped seasonal vegetables (potatoes, yellow squash, zucchini, butternut squash, green beans or peas all work)
4 cloves garlic, pressed or minced
½ teaspoon dried oregano
½ teaspoon dried thyme
1 large can (28 ounces) diced tomatoes, with their liquid (or 2 small 15-ounce cans)
4 cups (32 ounces) vegetable broth
2 cups water
1 teaspoon fine sea salt
2 bay leaves
Pinch of red pepper flakes
Freshly ground black pepper
1 cup whole grain orecchiette, elbow or small shell pasta
1 can (15 ounces) Great Northern beans or cannellini beans, rinsed and drained, or 1 ½ cups cooked beans
2 cups baby spinach, chopped kale or chopped collard greens
2 teaspoons lemon juice

Instructions

- Warm 3 tablespoons of the olive oil in a large Dutch oven or stockpot over medium heat. Once the oil is shimmering, add the chopped onion, carrot, celery, tomato paste and a pinch of salt. Cook, stirring often, until the vegetables have softened and the onions are turning translucent, about 7 to 10 minutes.
- Add the seasonal vegetables, garlic, oregano and thyme. Cook until fragrant while stirring frequently, about 2 minutes.
- Pour in the diced tomatoes and their juices, broth and water. Add the salt, bay leaves and red pepper flakes. Season generously with freshly ground black pepper.
- Raise heat to medium-high and bring the mixture to a boil, then partially cover the pot with the lid, leaving about a 1" gap for steam to escape. Reduce heat as necessary to maintain a gentle simmer.
- Cook for 15 minutes, then remove the lid and add the pasta, beans and greens. Continue simmering, uncovered, for 20 minutes or until the pasta is cooked al dente and the greens are tender.
- Remove the pot from the heat, then remove the bay leaves. Stir in the lemon juice and remaining tablespoon of olive oil. Taste and season with more salt and pepper until the flavors really sing.

Source: www.cookieandkate.com

Have a plant-based recipe you'd like to share with the community? Send it to GROW@westchester-il.gov for consideration for future newsletters.