



COMPOSTING



The Marion County Soil & Water Conservation District is a subdivision of state government and is funded primarily by the City of Indianapolis / Marion County government. The District works to assist county residents and others with a host of natural resource issues and concerns. These Conservation Fact Sheets are provided to assist people to better care for the land.



What is Composting?

Composting is the process of providing the ideal environment for organic matter decomposition, thus speeding up the decomposition process. The product of composting, called compost or humus, can provide vital nutrients to your soil, encouraging your plants to thrive.

Benefits of Using Compost:

- Adds organic matter to your garden and potted plants
- Improves soil structure, aeration, and water-holding capacity
- Provides plant nutrients
- Can be used as a mulch material
- May prevent some plant diseases



Photo by: Stoneworld

Materials to Compost:

- Grass clippings
- Garden trimmings
- Leaves
- Livestock manure
- Fruit and vegetable scraps
- Coffee grounds and filters
- Tea leaves and bags
- Wood chips and sawdust
- Pine and fir needles
- Straw and hay
- Nut shells
- Stale bread
- Shredded paper

Cold or Slow Composting

Benefits: You don't have to tend to the compost pile every day; Better at suppressing soil-borne diseases.

Disadvantages: Takes several months to a year for compost that is ready to use; Leaves some un-decomposed bits of material.

How to do it: Simply pile your compost materials in a bin or on the ground; Shredding materials before piling them will help speed up the composting process; Keep weeds and diseased plants out of the mix so they don't harm the plants they are spread around.

Hot Composting

Benefits: Provides finished compost in a few weeks; The heat kills most weed seeds and plant diseases.

Disadvantages: Requires working the pile a few minutes a day; May kill beneficial bacteria, leading to less disease resistance later.

How to do it: These piles do best with high-carbon materials and high-nitrogen materials mixed in a 1:1 ratio; The pile should have minimum dimensions of 3'x3'x3'; Water periodically so the pile is always moist; Punch holes in the sides of the pile for aeration; Start turning the pile when the internal temperature peaks at about 130 to 140 degrees Fahrenheit; Turn every day or two to have compost in less than 4 weeks.

There are commercial products available for both hot and cold composting. Contact the Marion County SWCD for additional information.