COMPOSTING ABC's

Learn how to make your own compost!

SANTA BARBARA COUNTY
Resource Recovery & Waste Management Division
Innovative Environmental Solutions

www.LessIsMore.org

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Resource Recovery and Waste Management
Division of the Santa Barbara County
Public Works Department
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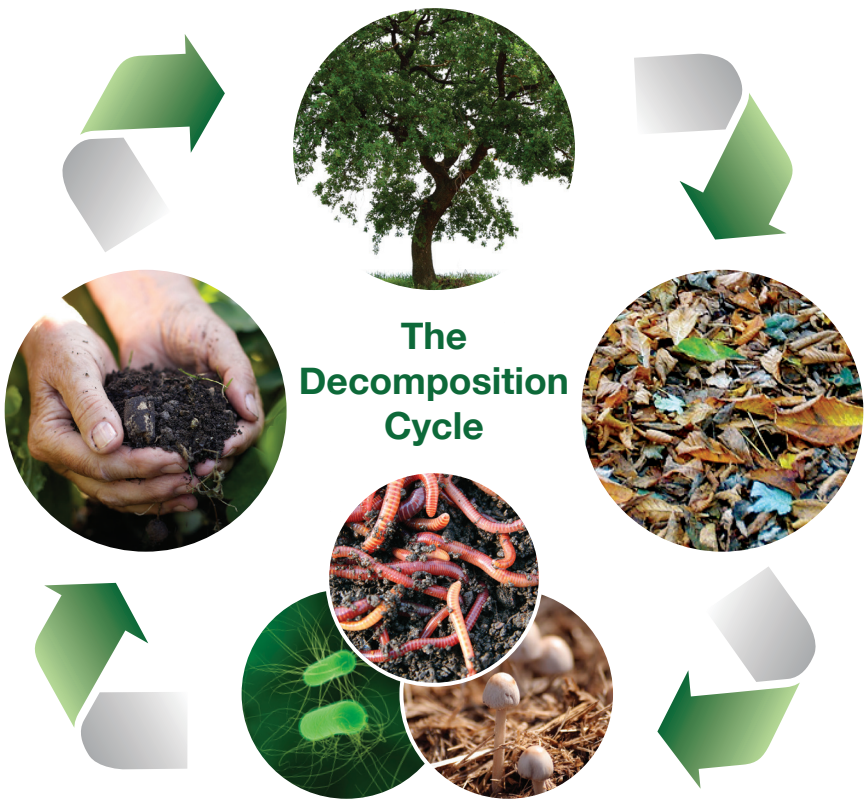
Introduction

This guide will show you how easy it is to make compost using garden trimmings and food scraps in your own backyard. Composting will improve the health and appearance of your yard and reduce money spent on fertilizers, all while preserving resources and helping to protect our planet.

Composting is nature's way of turning organic materials back into nutrient-rich soil in order for the cycle of life to continue. Fungi, bacteria and invertebrates in healthy soil transform organic matter into vital nutrients used by plants to nourish new growth. The best way to build healthy soil in your garden is by creating compost.



It's up to us to help nature complete its cycle!

Visit **www.LessIsMore.org** for more information.

Why Should We Compost?

Composting food scraps and yard waste where you live is the most sustainable way to handle these materials.

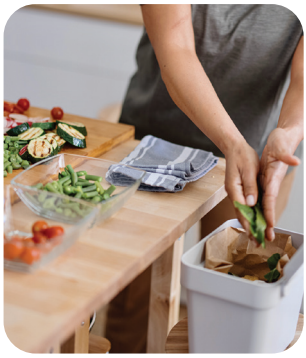
Food, yard waste, and other organics comprise about 40% of our waste stream here in Santa Barbara County! Composting where you live keeps most of these materials out of our industrial waste management systems. Local government agencies now provide curbside organics diversion programs, but you can help further reduce your impact by composting at home and sharing what you know with your friends and community!

When buried in landfills, organic waste such as food scraps and yard waste not only take up valuable landfill space, but they release methane as they decompose. Methane is a powerful greenhouse gas and major contributor to climate change.

While it's always best to compost as locally as you can, curbside programs can be used to commercially compost excess organic material or items that cannot be composted in at-home systems like meat and dairy.

If you live in the cities of Buellton, Goleta, Santa Barbara, Solvang, or the unincorporated areas of the Cuyama Valley, Santa Ynez Valley and South Coast, the County's ReSource Center recovers your food waste directly from the trash. Separated organics are then transformed into compost and clean energy. Since your food waste is being recovered from the trash, your green container should only contain yard waste, which is ground into mulch and offered back to the community!

If you live in the cities of Lompoc, Santa Maria, Guadalupe, Carpinteria, or the unincorporated areas of the Santa Maria and Lompoc Valleys, your food waste, food-soiled paper, and yard waste should all be placed in the green container. Everything in the green container will be composted at a commercial composting facility and used in local agriculture.



Visit **www.LessIsMore.org** for more information.

How Do You Compost?

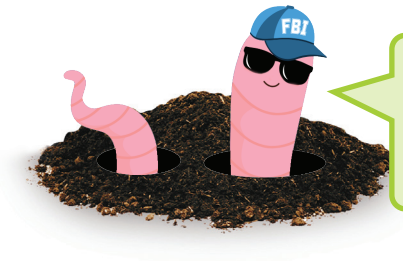
There are many ways to manage the decomposition of yard waste and food scraps where you live. A compost bin or pile is a contained way to manage the breakdown of these materials. Naturally, the decomposition process will happen no matter how you control it.

Meet Nature's FBI

Fungi

Bacteria

Invertebrates



Decomposers like me break down organic waste into compost!

Option 1

Check out the **aerobic composting section** on the next page if you have enough outdoor space and generate yard waste and food scraps that you would like to compost.

Option 2

If you live in multi-family housing, want to compost in your classroom or office, or only generate food scraps, then check out **vermicomposting** – composting with worms – on page 7.

Visit **www.LessIsMore.org** for more information.

Aerobic Composting

We recommend aerobic composting for those with outdoor space. You can easily turn yard and food waste into compost in as little as 3 months.

Aerobic means requiring the presence of oxygen. Oxygen is essential to keep our friends the FBI (see page 3) alive. The FBI will naturally show up in your system. It's your job to keep these critters happy and productively breaking down introduced materials from your yard and kitchen.

Selecting a pile or bin

Some people start with a pile, and move up to a bin when they're ready.

You can give your pile some structure with chicken wire or by nailing scrap wood together to make a four-sided box. You can even compost in a pile and cover with a tarp!

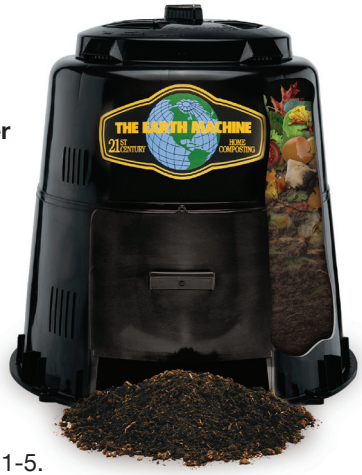
If you want something more contained, the County sells Earth Machine Composting Bins for half price!

Get them at these locations:

South Coast Recycling and Transfer Station:
4430 Calle Real, Santa Barbara
Open Monday – Saturday, 7–5.

Santa Ynez Valley Recycling and Transfer Station
4004 Foxen Canyon Road, Los Olivos
Open Tuesday – Saturday, 8:30–4.

North County Public Works Building:
620 W. Foster Road, Orcutt
Open Monday – Friday, 8 –12, 1–5.
This location only accepts exact cash or check made out to "County of SB/RRWM"



New Cuyama Transfer Station
5073 Highway 66
Open Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays 11-5.
Compost bins from this location must be purchased online before pickup. Head to www.LessIsMore.org/payment to purchase, or reach out to us via email for assistance.

Take the time to consider your options and then select a bin or pile to fit your needs.

Placement

Select an unpaved, flat and shady or partly shady spot near a water source, and preferably out of sight. You should also consider proximity to your feedstock (yard and kitchen waste). Ideally, the compost area should be at least three feet wide by three feet deep by three feet tall.

General Ingredients

- **3 parts Browns, as a carbon source**
- **2 parts Greens, as a nitrogen source**
- **Water, just enough to keep materials moist**
- **Oxygen, throughout materials so the FBI can breathe**

Browns

Yard trimmings, eggshells, nut shells, ashes from wood burning fires, sawdust, hay and straw, houseplants, wood chips, leaves, shredded paper products, cotton or wool rags.

Greens

Raw or cooked fruits and vegetables, bread and grains, coffee grounds and paper filters, grass clippings, paper tea bags, manure from herbivorous animals.

Keep Out:

Dairy products, fats and oils, greasy foods, meat, pet wastes, anything treated with chemicals or pesticides, stickers from fruits and vegetables, roots of perennial weeds, coal, glass, metals, plastics.

Visit **www.LessIsMore.org** for more information.

The Easy Method of Composting

Follow these simple steps to create compost:

1. Add **three parts brown materials** and **two parts green materials** together. Smaller pieces mean more surface area for the FBI to work their magic and generate a quicker finished compost.
2. **Mix brown materials,** like dried leaves, into the pile and always be sure to **bury greens** (fruit and vegetable waste) under 10 inches of browns. As long as greens are buried, there will be no odor.
3. The pile **should be warm** as materials break down.
4. Before you add to the pile, **turn over and fluff the pile** using a shovel or pitchfork to get oxygen into the pile.
5. **Keep the pile as moist** as a wrung-out sponge. **TIP:** add water if necessary during step 4.
6. When material at the bottom is dark and rich in color, with no remnants of food or yard waste, your compost is ready to use. You can screen large chunks out if you like, or leave it as is.
7. Depending on how you manage your system, **you can have finished compost in as little as 3 months.**

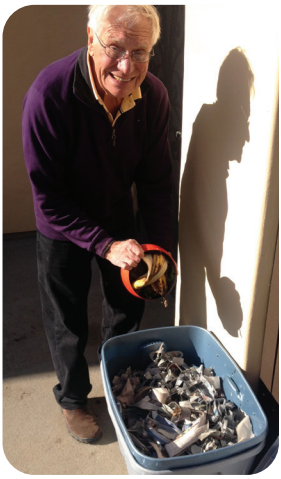
Troubleshooting:

Problem	Cause	Solution
Rotten egg smell	Not enough air or too wet	Turn pile and incorporate browns
Ammonia smell	Too many greens	Incorporate browns
Pile doesn't heat or decomposes slowly	Pile too small	Add more organic matter
	Insufficient moisture	Turn pile and add water
	Not enough air	Turn pile
	Cold weather	Increase size and insulate with straw or tarp

Visit **www.LessIsMore.org** for more information.

Vermicomposting

Vermicomposting uses worms to consume organic waste, ideally small amounts of non-fatty food scraps. Worms eat their weight in organic material each day and then produce a finished compost product called castings. Vermicomposting requires less space than other composting methods, and is ideal for indoor areas like classrooms and apartments. Vermicomposting is also recommended for high-density urban areas with little yard waste and space.



Overview

Vermicompost in a covered container with a bedding of newspaper or leaves. Fruit and vegetable scraps are added as food for the worms. Over time, the food and bedding will be replaced with castings, a rich brown matter that is an excellent natural plant food.

What size bin should I build?

The size of the bin depends on the amount of food waste your household produces in one week.

Use the formula: one square foot of surface area per pound of food scraps produced per week. For example, a bin that is 4 square feet is perfect for 4 pounds of food scraps produced per week.

How many worms do I need?

You'll need two (2) pounds of worms to every one pound of food scraps produced per day.

What do worms like to eat?

Vegetable scraps, fruit peels and scraps, leaves, tea bags, coffee grounds and filters, untreated paper towels and tissue paper.

Fun Fact: worms especially enjoy pumpkin and melon scraps.

Keep Out:

Meat and bones, dairy products, oils and fat, and woody yard waste.

Visit **www.LessIsMore.org** for more information.

Creating Your System

What you need:

- **Electric drill with ¼ inch drill bit — or you can punch holes manually**
- **2 plastic bins***
- **Newspaper and handful of garden soil**
- **Food scraps**
- **Red wiggler worms (Buy at Island Seed & Feed or online)**

*Bin #1 will be for your composting worms and bedding, and Bin #2 for catching the drainage or leachate.

STEP 1 Drill or punch **ventilation holes in Bin #1 around the top** and **drain holes on the bottom** of compost bin.

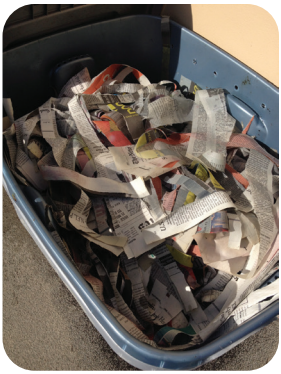
STEP 2 Drill or punch **holes on the side of Bin #2** (leachate bin) for ventilation, just below the mid ridge in the bin.

STEP 3 Place the **top onto the worm bin** (you will only need one). Then place **Bin #1 into Bin #2.**

STEP 4 **Shred** 3 to 4 pounds of **newspapers into ½ inch strips.** Soak shredded strips in water and then squeeze out water so strips are damp.

Visit **www.LessIsMore.org** for more information.

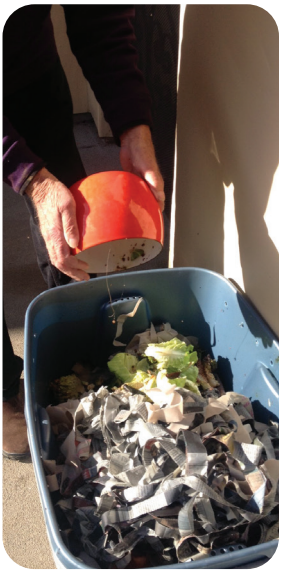
STEP 5 **Fill Bin #1** 3/4 of the way full with prepared bedding material. Keeping the paper loose and fluffy is the goal. Mix in a handful or two of garden soil into the bedding.



STEP 6 **Place Bin in a completely shady and accessible area** with moderate temperatures of 55 to 75°.

STEP 7 **Add worms** evenly and lightly over the damp bedding material. Let the worms acclimate to their new home for a week before introducing food scraps.

STEP 8 A week after introducing worms you can **feed your worms** by spreading out a thin layer in just one area of the bin in the middle of the bedding material and alternate weekly where you place the food.



TIP: to aid the decomposition process, chop, shred, and bruise waste before feeding to your worms.

STEP 9 **Check your bin** when you add food for moisture level (moist as a wrung-out sponge), and ensure that added food is always covered with a few inches of damp bedding material.

Visit **www.LessIsMore.org** for more information.

Harvesting Your Finished Castings

After 4 to 6 months, push the castings produced by your worms to one side of the bin and place fresh bedding in the other. For about a month, bury food scraps in the fresh bedding to allow the older compost to mature. After harvesting the finished compost, add more damp bedding to that side.

Troubleshooting: Problem	Cause	Solution
Fly population	Exposed food	Add one inch of fresh bedding and add moisture. Can add a small amount of baking soda.
Ammonia smell	Anaerobic Conditions	Add fresh bedding and fluff up
Ant population	Bedding is too dry	Keep bedding moist

Make Your Own Compost Tea:

1. Fill a bucket with water.
2. Place compost inside pantyhose or cheese cloth.
3. Soak compost in water for 3–5 days, stirring occasionally.
4. Dilute as desired.
5. Apply directly to plants.

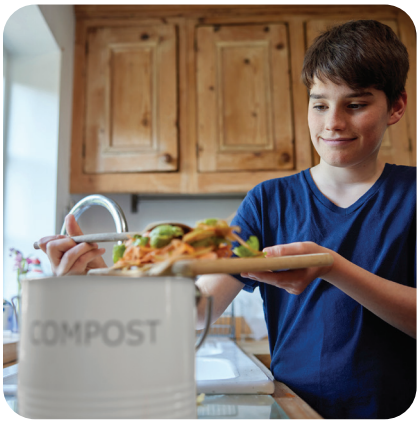
Try this idea!

Using Your Compost

Whether you aerobically compost or use a vermicomposting system, you will be left with digested organic material – finished compost!

You can work your finished compost into the soil or simply leave it on the surface above plant roots. Applied compost will increase nutrient levels, permeability, water retention of your soil, and much more!

No garden? No problem! Finished compost can also be donated to community gardens or shared with friends and neighbors.



Congratulations!

You have just closed the loop and made a huge positive impact by composting as locally as you can and making your own high quality compost for your garden!

Resources:

- **Visit: LessIsMore.org/compost**
- **Call Santa Barbara County's Composting Specialist: (805) 882-3600**
- **Composting Council: http://compostingcouncil.org/**
- **Visit the links or call the numbers provided in this booklet.**

Waste Reduction

It's always best to reduce your waste in the first place. In your kitchen, **waste as little food as possible.** In your yard, **keep clippings and leaves on site as mulch.** You can save money and help the environment while reducing your waste!

In Your Kitchen

Limiting food waste reduces the need to compost as much material. Try these simple methods to reduce waste:

- **Inventory and use** what you have before you buy more.
- **Make a plan** before you go shopping. Only buy what you will use.
- **Be creative** by using the edible parts of foods that you normally throw away. Make stock for soups and sauces, sauté beet tops, and make croutons from stale bread.
- **Donate** healthy, safe, and untouched foods to food banks.
- **Freeze, preserve, or can** surplus fruits and vegetables.
- **Know how much food** you're actually wasting by measuring your waste.
- **Reduce plate waste** by only taking what you will eat.

Visit **LessIsMore.org/FoodForward** to learn more about feeding people or animals in your community with the food waste you can't reduce.

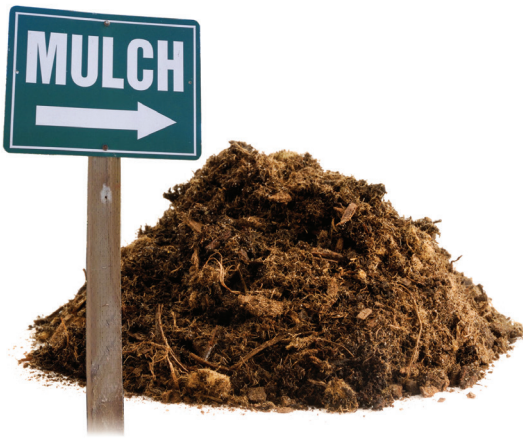
In Your Yard

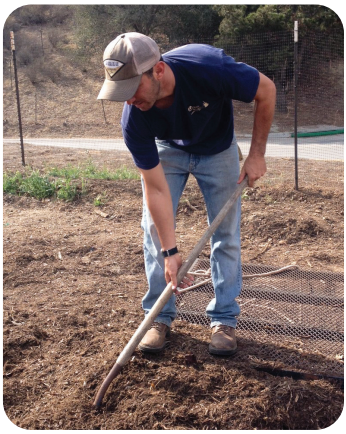
Do more by doing less!

Keep fallen leaves, grass clippings, and other yard materials in your yard as a mulch.

Mulch can be organic material such as wood chips, grass clippings, leaves or compost that is spread over the soil surface. Mulch will conserve water, suppress weeds, and moderate soil temperatures – all while naturally decomposing into the soil and nourishing your plants. This is the natural cycle.

Alternatively, yard waste can be recycled in your region's curbside green cart program. Please see page 2 for information about curbside programs.





Call **(805) 681-4981** or **(805) 686-5084** to learn how you can pick up free mulch or get it delivered for a small fee.

Visit **www.LessIsMore.org** for more information.

For more information please visit:

LessIsMore.org

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