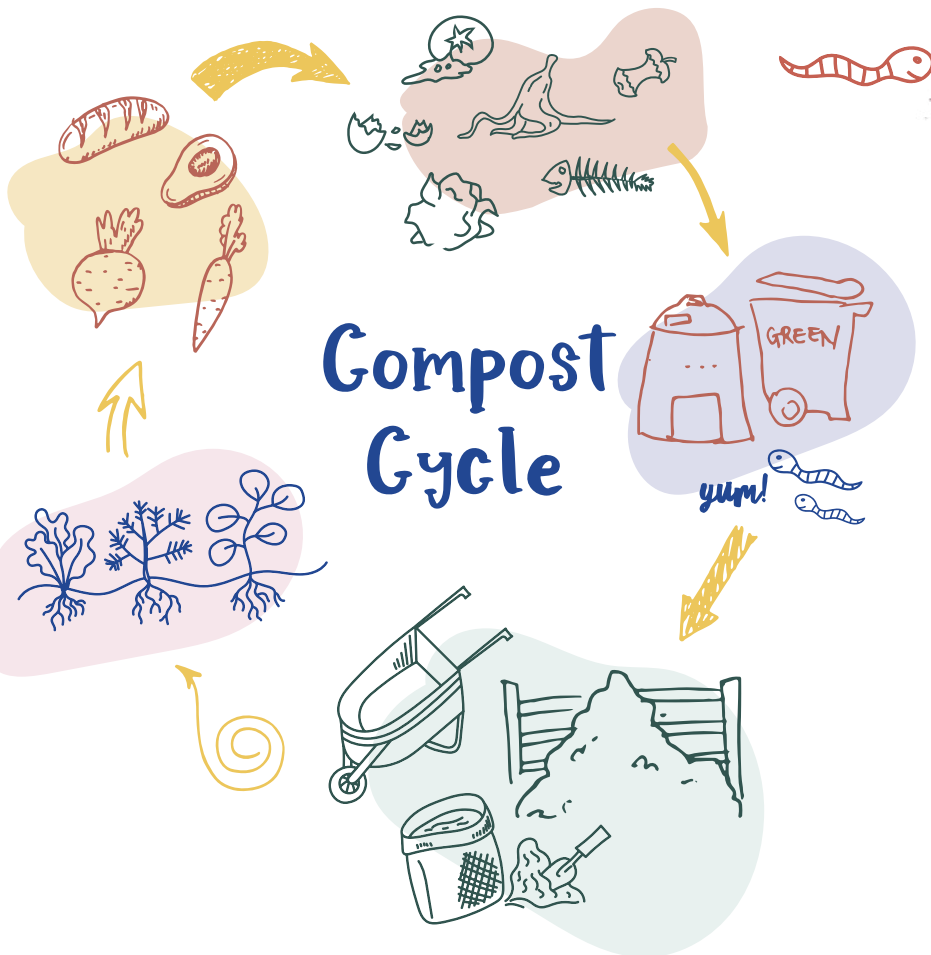


Composting in your Community

Get composting and keep food scraps out of the landfill

Compost is so valuable that it is commonly referred to as black gold. But what is compost? Compost is organic material, such as food scraps and leaves, that has been broken down into a nutrient-rich soil. Humans have been intentionally composting food scraps since the Stone Age.



Build Your Own Composter

Time: 1 day or less

CLAIM

10 Systems Thinker points

Many municipalities collect organic waste in green bins and truck it away for large-scale composting or to turn it into electricity through *anaerobic digestion* (a process that transforms food waste into energy and other products). Others offer backyard composters. If that doesn't happen in your community, don't let it stop you. You can compost at school,⁷⁸ in your garden or in an empty lot. If you don't have access to an outdoor space, you can compost indoors using worms (see Activity #8).



You'll Need:

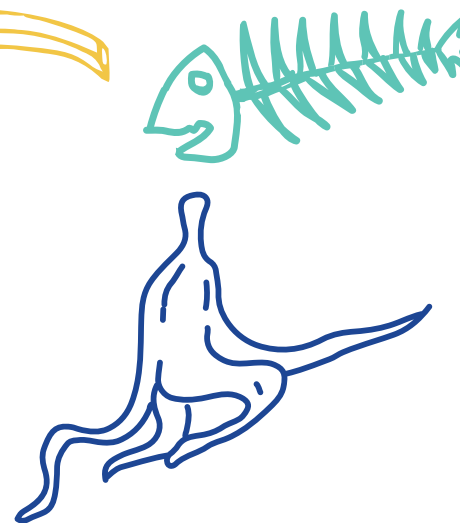
You can make a compost bin out of almost anything—a garbage bin with holes drilled in it, old tires, straw bales or wooden pallets and chicken wire.

*Find more do-it-yourself
compost bin ideas.⁷⁹*

Making it Happen:

There are a few simple rules to keep in mind to maintain a healthy, earthy-smelling compost⁸⁰ and you will be able to process organic material into rich soil every year:

- Balance two parts dry, brown, fibrous plant material (dry leaves, straw or torn cardboard) to one-part greens (food scraps or plant trimmings).
- Keep it handy. Make sure your compost is easy to access so you'll use it and care for it regularly.
- Let it breathe. Make sure air can get in. Transfer it to a second bin or stir your compost with a shovel or pitchfork once a year.
- Don't dry it or drown it. Keep your compost moist.
- Keep the critters out using chicken wire or a lid, and avoid attracting animals by keeping fats, meats and dairy out of your compost.



Want to do More?

Start a community compost program:

Now that you know how to make healthy compost, you can apply this knowledge at a community scale, like the youth composting operation [BK Rot](#) in the United States, [WastenotFarms](#) vermicomposting business in Canada⁸¹ or the [Oaxaca Worm Action Network](#) in Mexico.⁸² Find an interested group of friends to join you in starting a community compost site.⁸³ Brainstorm these questions:



Youth from [BK Rot](#) community composting program. Young people in Brooklyn are creating jobs for themselves by composting over 4,500 kilograms of organic waste from residents and restaurants in their community garden every week, all transported by bike for a zero-carbon footprint solution.⁸⁴



- **Where to put it?** Could you get permission to put a composter in your school or community center? Is there a farm or community garden that could house your composting program? Is this place easy to get to? Does it have access to water?
- **Who will feed it?** Ask local residents and restaurants. How much food waste do they create? Do they understand what is allowed in the compost and why?
- **How will you pick up?** Where will they leave organic waste for you to pick up? How often will you pick it up? How will you transport it?
- **What are the numbers?** How much compost will you transport each week? How much help will you need? Will you charge a fee for your service or finished compost?
- **Is it allowed?** Check into local regulations. Some regions have strict regulations around waste hauling. Do you need an operating license?



⁷⁸Institute for Local Self-Reliance (2018). Guide to Composting Onsite at Schools. <<https://ilsr.org/ilsr-guide-to-composting-onsite-at-schools/>>

⁷⁹Backyard Growers (2017). 23 Ingenious DIY Compost Bin Ideas. <<http://backyardgrowers.com/23-ingenious-diy-compost-bin-ideas/>>

⁸⁰Grow Veg (2013). The Perfect Compost Recipe How to Get your Compost Heap Cooking. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M1klpCBD3UI>>

⁸¹Wastenot Farms. (2017). <<http://wastenotfarms.com/>>

⁸²SiKanda Solidaridad Internacional Kanda A.C.(2015). Children, youth, and earthworms: a friendship built on the soil. <<https://www.si-kanda.org/ninos-ninas-jovenes-y-lombrices-una-amistad-hecha-en-la-tierra/>>

⁸³Someday I'll learn blog. Starting a Community Compost Site. <<https://somedayilllearn.com/community-compost/>>

⁸⁴Vocativ (2018). Meet the Teenage Bikers Composting in Brooklyn. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zT3f6nQWFAU>>