



The main responsibility is actively managing the garden compost pile. This includes gathering proper quantities of brown and green materials; building piles and actively managing them with aeration and moisture; and coordinating the distribution of the finished product. If you are unable to complete your responsibilities, please contact the WCG Garden Manager so that they can make other arrangements.

Gathering Proper Quantities of Brown and Green Materials

Over the course of a year, a community garden creates a lot of “waste” in the form of woody, carbon-rich material from corn stalks, tomato vines, squash vines, and other vegetables. In compost terms, these are your “browns,” which also includes things like leaves and straw. If gardeners add too much of these brown materials (or fail to chop them properly into fist-size pieces), it creates a massive brush pile that attracts rodents and won’t rapidly decompose.

For this reason, WCG requires active management of a compost pile with the proper ratios of browns and greens. “Greens” are materials that are added for their higher nitrogen content, and include such things as coffee grounds, supermarket produce waste, and grass clippings. Much like a recipe that you concoct and then put in the oven, an active compost pile is built by gathering the correct amount of materials from the garden and external sources, chopping them up into compostable sizes, and regularly watering and turning the pile. This method allows the pile to decompose at the fastest rate possible and will result in finished compost in less than 6 weeks.

WCG offers a composting workshop each year, and the WCG Green Team Farm (650 W. 100 S.) has a drop-in composting operation that weekly builds compost piles. We highly recommend taking advantage of these opportunities to educate yourself before building a pile of your own.

Active Management of Compost Piles

To create a 4’x4’x4’ pile, you will need about 110 five-gallon buckets of material, with 65 buckets of browns and 45 buckets of greens (60-to-40 ratio). Ideal brown materials include: plant stalks, vines, leaves, straw, and shredded paper. Ideal green materials include: juicer pulp, produce waste, manure, grass clippings, coffee grounds, and brewery waste.

When the pile is built, the temperature will rise quickly. Once the temperature hits 131 degrees, the pile will need to be turned five times in the next 15 days – or once every third day. The pile should be turned with a pitchfork for 10-15 minutes each time, in order to aerate the pile and accelerate the decomposition. Caution: Use a dust mask from the garden shed and be aware of the wind direction and presence of others in the area, as turning the compost pile will release airborne particles that can cause allergic reactions in some people. During each pile turning, chop up any larger materials with pruners. Generally, weeds are discouraged in the compost, but if the pile temperature rises to above 131 degrees, weed seeds will be killed. Meat or dairy should never be added to piles. Piles should be kept moist with weekly watering in the spring, twice a week during the summer, and weekly after September. During this active composting process, new materials should not be added to the pile, so please post a sign stating, “Compost is Cooking, DO NOT ADD”. After the fifth turning, the pile will mature on it’s own and gradually cool to ambient temperature as finished compost.

Coordinating the Distribution of the Finished Product

The garden group should discuss and decide how the finished compost will be available. Should the priority be for common areas such as You-Pick-It fence lines, fruit trees, etc? Or, is the compost available for all gardeners to take a share? Coordinate these decisions by emailing the group when the compost is ready. The compost bins are required to be cleaned out by November 15th each year to avoid attracting rodents.