

# Intro To Compost

**Maine Learning Results:** ELA:D1, D2; Science:F2, F4, M4, M6

**Purpose:** To understand the reason for, basic practices and benefits of compost

## **Key Concepts:**

- Composting is another form of recycling
- Fruit and vegetable scraps, eggshells, coffee grounds, garden waste, leaves and grass clippings can all be composted
- To keep a healthy compost pile, you need a ratio of 'green' to 'brown' matter.

**Activity:** Introduce the lesson by asking for class feedback on recycling. Capture the feedback on the board or a flip chart, making a list of what they know about recycling, and why we recycle.

Next, introduce the term compost, and capture class feedback about composting. Augment their knowledge about compost, explaining its purpose and benefits.

Break students up into small groups, giving each group a pre-prepared bag. Each group will need to sort the contents of the bag into what can be recycled, reused, composted, and what must be thrown away, and they will need to report back to the rest of the class on their decisions.

After students have sorted and reported on their bags, ask them what they know about the practice of composting. Collect their compostable material, and demonstrate the building of a mini compost pile in a large, clear glass or plastic container by layering food waste (green matter) with dry plant material like dry leaves or straw (brown matter) like a layer cake. A healthy compost pile needs 3 times as much brown matter as green matter.

Good additions to the compost pile are fruit and vegetable scraps, coffee grounds, eggshells, garden waste, dead leaves, grass clippings.

Compost piles should be turned over and mixed up every 2-3 weeks or so with a shovel or pitchfork, and in 8-10 weeks it should become finished compost, which is like rich, moist soil. The ideal size for a compost pile is 3 feet by 5 feet.

Finished compost is a great fertilizer to be added to garden soil, to seed starting trays, or to top-dress plants that are already in the ground.

There is much information about composting to be had out there, including numerous internet resources and plenty of hard copy resources from the University Cooperative Extension.

## **Materials:**

- pre-prepared grocery bags filled with recyclable materials, trash and food scraps such as onion skins, carrot ends etc. in ziploc bags

- tupperware container filled with finished compost
- plastic bag filled with dry leaves, straw, or dry grass
- large, square, clear plastic or glass container, at least 6 inches deep

#### **Follow Up Activities:**

- Enlist parent volunteer support or your shop class to build outdoor compost bins for your school garden. There are also many bins available for sale on the internet, and many pest proof bin building plans from organizations such as City Farm in Vancouver.
- Begin a compost campaign in your school, by creating compost propaganda and educating the rest of the school about the benefits of compost. This can be a great way for students to demonstrate what they have learned.
- Work with your food service director and kitchen staff to begin collecting food scraps for your class compost pile