
COME, POST YOUR COMPOST

**THE
COMPOSTER'S
GUIDE TO
FINISHED
COMPOST**



TENNESSEE
ENVIRONMENTAL
COUNCIL



Department of
**Environment &
Conservation**



TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. An Introduction to Finished Compost.....2

II. How to Use Finished Compost.....3

III. Screened Compost.....5

IV. D.I.Y. Compost Screen.....6



AN INTRODUCTION TO FINISHED COMPOST

How do I know when my compost is 'finished'?

Finished compost will have a dark color and crumbly texture along with an earthy smell. If it is stringy or too lumpy or you can pick out any of the original ingredients/food scraps, it still needs more time to work its magic. One way to test to see if your compost is finished is using the "bag test." Put a handful of compost into a sealed plastic bag, pushing out all of the air prior to sealing it shut. After leaving your compost in the bag for 3 days, open it up and smell: if it has a sour odor, it means that the microorganisms are still at work and it needs more time. It is important to know that your compost is finished prior to using it otherwise it can be harmful to your plants.

Benefits of Finished Compost

- Helps retain soil moisture
 - Moisture retention properties also help encourage wise water use in the garden
 - Environmentally-friendly alternative to chemical fertilizers
 - Helps prevent plant diseases and pests
 - Encourages beneficial bacteria and fungi in soil
 - Encourages healthy root systems
 - Enhances soil composition
 - Increased soil quality means increased plant health and plant yields
 - Balances soil pH
-

HOW TO USE FINISHED COMPOST

AMENDING SOIL

No matter what type of soil you have, adding compost will improve it. *While compost is very nutrient rich, it cannot be used on its own as a replacement for soil.* Rather, just mix some of your finished compost into the top 3-5 inches of soil to improve its overall quality and health!



INDOOR PLANTS

Don't have the luxury of an outdoor garden? No problem! Compost is also a great additive for your indoor plants that will give them a nutritional boost and revitalize your indoor garden. Just mix the compost in with your potting soil 2 times per year to keep your plants happy and healthy.



VEGETABLE/FLOWER GROWTH

Once spring arrives, mix compost into the topsoil of your vegetable garden to add extra nutrients that will enhance growth and yield. As your vegetables continue to grow, add ½ inch layer of compost around the base of the plant--vegetables such as tomatoes, squash, and corn particularly thrive with a once-a-month application of compost at the base. The arrival of spring also provides a great opportunity to loosen up the topsoil of your flower gardens (both perennial and annual) and add in an inch of compost into the soil.



GARDEN MAINTENANCE



Your finished compost will also have many uses in your outdoor garden, particularly during the fall as this is considered the best time to add compost. Some uses include mixing it in with or sprinkling it on top of flower, vegetable, and/or tree beds to serve as a mulch.

PLANTING A NEW TREE OR SHRUB

Compost will also be a great way to give your new tree/shrub the healthy start it needs! When planting your tree or shrub, work up to 1 inch of compost into the top 2 inches of soil starting from the tree trunk all the way out to the outmost area of the tree cover. You can also add a layer of compost in this area to serve as a nutrient-rich mulch. *However, don't place compost directly against the bark of the tree or shrub as it can cause it to rot.*



LAWN CARE

Whether you're planting new plots of grass or want to add a growth-boost to your existing lawn, finished compost is a great addition. When seeding a new plot, mix up to 3 inches of finished compost into the top layer of soil prior to seeding. When giving existing turf a needed boost, scatter 1/2 inch of screened compost across grass and spread it evenly with a rake.



SCREENED COMPOST

Why should I screen my compost?

While sifting/screening your compost is by no means necessary, there are some potential benefits depending how the finished compost will be used. Screening your finished compost before applying it to your garden or lawn can be beneficial in the following ways:

- Removes sticks, debris, un-composted food scraps, and produce stickers
- Adds air to the mixture
- Breaks compost into smaller pieces--easier for spreading
- Removes worms (if they are being used) that can be put back in the pile

When do I use screened/sifted compost?

Screened compost isn't ideal for all applications, as unscreened compost may be more helpful in improving/supporting soil structure when it is being directly mixed into the topsoil. However, sifted compost might be a better option for applications such as lawn care (scattering compost across the grass), indoor plant application, or spreading (not mixing) compost on the top surface of the soil.

How do I screen my compost?

1. Place and secure screen over a large container (depending on how much compost you have to screen).
2. Place finished compost (handfuls at a time) on top of the screen and shake over the container.
3. Screened/fine compost will fall through into the container while debris will stay on top to be thrown back into the pile.
4. Your screened compost is now ready for use!

Where do I get a compost screen?

Below are just a few options of the types of sifters/screens you can find online. However, if you're interested in making your own, refer to page 7 for further instructions.



Achla Designs Compost Sifter Screen with Handles- \$34 at Amazon



UPP 2-in-1 Garden Sifter- \$17 at Amazon



Fox Peak Outdoor Supply Trapping Dirt Sifter- \$13 at Amazon

DIY COMPOST SCREEN

Materials:

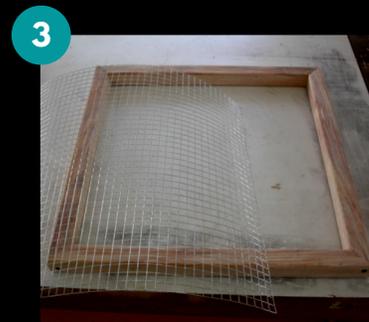
- Scrap wood such as 2.5" x 3/4" pine, or an existing frame
- Saw, Hammer & nails
- Staple gun
- Hardware cloth with 1/4" mesh
- Clipper to cut hardware cloth



Step 1: Cut the wood into two pairs of the same length to create a square or rectangle (based on material availability or preference)



Step 2: Place wood into regular rectangle and nail pieces together (you can use a nail gun, hammer and nail, or screws--glue will not hold it together)



Step 3: Place the frame over the hardware cloth and cut the hardware cloth accordingly to fit the frame



Step 4: Place the cut hardware cloth directly over the assembled frame and secure the cloth with a staple gun on each side of the frame



Step 5: Success! You now have your very own compost screen