

DID YOU KNOW?

Composting is the controlled natural decomposition of organic material (from plants and animals) such as leaves, yard trimmings, grass clippings as well as fruit and vegetable scraps. Microorganisms break down this material into compost, a crumbly, dark-colored, earthy-smelling, soil-like material. That material is a nutrient-rich product that can be used in your garden, flower beds and lawn. There are many benefits to composting.

◆ **Compost is a valuable product.** Compost improves soil by increasing aeration (the ability of air to circulate) and water-holding capacity (reducing your need to water) as well as helping plants absorb nutrients.

✂ **Compost reduces or eliminates chemical fertilizer and pesticide use.** This can save money and help protect the environment by reducing runoff pollution.

★ **Compost reduces the amount of waste a school generates.** Disposing of yard trimmings and food waste in landfills often is unnecessary and is a waste of space.

♻ **Save money.** Save money by buying fewer bags for garbage and leaves. Save money by buying fewer bags of compost from retail outlets. Make your own valuable product at school for free.

SOLID WASTE COMPOSTING GUIDANCE FOR SCHOOLS

The S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) encourages schools to consider setting up compost programs. Whether a large-scale, school-wide program or small, single classroom effort, composting helps schools reduce waste, protect the environment, create a useful product, provide a hands-on learning experience for students, and perhaps save money.

This guidance document outlines basic requirements and recommendations for schools in setting up and running a compost program.

DHEC recognizes that even though permitting and testing requirements for the final product are not applicable to exempt schools, certain risks are associated with composting and should be addressed.

All composting sites should have specific waste separation practices in place to ensure that unacceptable material (e.g., glass, paper, plastic bags and metal) is not placed in the compost mix. Items such as glass or metal may injure people who work with the compost mix or the final product.

There also are risks at all composting sites associated with pathogens (both plant and animal) in the compost mix and compost product. Additionally, if the composting process is not complete, the product may reheat and cause damage or death to plants grown in the product.

DHEC recommends that schools with composting programs follow the guidelines (see back page) in order to minimize the risks. All risks, however, never can be eliminated and all persons who may come into contact with the composting mix or the finished compost product should be notified of the potential risks.

NOTE:

Schools that compost solid waste, yard trimmings and land-clearing debris are exempt from permitting and registration requirements as long as:

1. all of the waste composted is generated on site; and
2. the compost generated is used on site.

If any material to be used in the compost mix is generated at other sites (e.g., student homes), registration, permitting, financial assurance and compost product testing may be required by state regulation.

DHEC's Office of Solid Waste Reduction and Recycling (Office) offers workshops, printed materials and other assistance on composting through its Smart Gardener Program. To learn more about composting or the Smart Gardener Program, call **1-800-768-7348** or visit www.scdhec.gov/environment/lwm/recycle/compost.htm. The Office also offers a composting guide "Home Composting Made Easy" at no charge.

RECOMMENDED GUIDELINES

- Yard trimmings, land-clearing debris and other approved solid waste should be a minimum of 80 percent by volume of the total compost mix. These items should be available for the compost mix at all times.
- Only food scraps generated on site may be used in the compost mix.
- Acceptable food scraps that may be used in the compost mix should fall within the following parameters:
 - food scraps that may be composted are limited to uncooked fruit and vegetable matter as well as bakery waste generated in on-site cafeterias. Also, coffee grounds, tea bags and eggshells generated on site may be used;
 - dairy products and their derivatives, meat, bones, meat by-products or grease ARE NOT ALLOWED; and
 - plastic bags, wrappings, ties and string ARE NOT ALLOWED.
- Food scraps SHOULD NOT be left uncovered for more than two hours.
- Food scraps may be stored for a period not to exceed 24 hours of receipt at the site in a closed, covered container that will control odors and prevent the attraction of birds, insects, rodents and other animals.
- In no case should food scraps be allowed to remain on site for more than 24 hours before its incorporation into working compost.
- The compost pile should be operated in a matter to:
 - control odors;
 - control birds, insects, rodents and other animals; and
 - control leachate (rainwater that passes through the compost pile) and run-off from the compost.
- Compost should be turned sufficiently to maintain aerobic conditions at all times throughout the compost pile.
- The processing of compostable material must begin within three days of generation or that material must be disposed of properly. If the waste to be used contains grass clippings, processing of that waste must begin within 24 hours of generation or that material must be disposed of properly.
- Material to be used in the composting process should not be mixed with finished compost.
- Open burning of solid waste is prohibited at the site.
- Worms can be added to the composting operation if the project is a planned vermicomposting operation.
- If the site is at a school, plans should be made so that the composting operation is complete and all compost is properly disposed of prior to the end of the school year.
- Animal waste and/or bedding material that has been in contact with animal waste may not be added to the compost mixture.

NOTE: Composting falls under S.C. solid waste regulation, R.61-107.4 Solid Waste Management: Yard Trash and Land-Clearing Debris; and Compost, or R.61-107.6 Solid Waste Management: Solid Waste Processing Facilities. For more information, call **1-800-768-7348** or visit www.scdhec.gov/recycle.

