



Let's Start Composting!

Grow, Eat...Compost...Repeat! That is the theme of International Composting Awareness Week (ICAW) May 2-8. According to CompostFoundation.org, the theme is based on the movement of the organics flowing from farm to table to farm again. This circular process turns recycled organic materials into compost, which then creates healthy soils, which leads to more nutrient rich fruits and vegetables. When those scraps go back to being composted, the process starts all over again!

Compost adds nutrients back into the soil, promotes erosion control and closes the loop by avoiding the loss of valuable organic resources. From backyard composting to large-scale commercial composting, this amazing resource provides an ecologically responsible way to manage organic materials.

There are different ways to compost in Middletown. Residents can compost in their backyards, they can bring food scraps to a municipal drop off location, or they can hire a private company to pick up their food scraps at their house, apartment or condo. Leaves that are picked up by City crews in the fall, are composted at a local farm, and restaurants on Main Street are starting to divert their food waste for composting and clean energy.

If you can, backyard composting is easy, inexpensive and fun. It is the best way to manage your organic materials, including leaves and food scraps. It reduces greenhouse gases associated with waste incinerators and landfills, reduces pollution from transporting the material and reduces garbage disposal costs. You might even be able to reduce the size of your trash cart, and save yourself money!

There are four elements you need for composting: carbon-rich materials (i.e. leaves, sawdust, woodchips or shredded paper), nitrogen-rich materials (i.e. food scraps or grass clippings with no pesticides), oxygen and water. You will need an area for a pile or a specific bin for the materials, a way to mix and aerate the materials (such as a pitch fork) and a way to water the pile. You will also need a good system of collecting food scraps from your kitchen. There are lots of collection containers for sale, or you can use an empty yogurt container or kitty litter bucket, depending on the size that works for you.

Basically, build your pile with leaves, bring your kitchen scraps and bury them in the pile, keep adding leaves at a ratio of about 3 parts leaves (or carbon material) to 1 part food scraps (or nitrogen material). Mix it with a pitch fork once a week or so to keep oxygen flowing through it and water as needed. The consistency should be like a run out sponge. Once it's composted, you can remove the compost from the bottom and let it set for a month or so and perhaps screen it to remove any materials that did not thoroughly compost.

Your compost is ready when it smells earthy and is soil like or loamy. It can then be used as an amendment in your garden, when planting trees, in potted plants or on your lawn.

If you can't compost at home, maybe you can connect with a neighbor or family member to compost. There is an app called "ShareWaste" which connects composters with people that want to compost. You can also hire a private compost collector to pick up your food scraps weekly. These companies usually offer a give back program, where they will give you back some compost in the spring for your efforts.

Another option for residents is to bring food scraps to the City drop off at the Recycling Center on Johnson Street. We take food scraps there and they get delivered to the anaerobic digester in Southington. This facility uses the food scraps to make clean energy and a compost product. The City is also in the process of adding an additional drop off location in the south end of town and will be excited to be announcing this soon!

It is important to note that if you use a private service or bring food scraps to a drop off, the list of acceptable materials is slightly different. Whereas, you don't want to put bones, meat, dairy or greasy items in your backyard compost, while we can accept these at the drop off and with the curbside service.

Lastly, there are several businesses in Middletown who have already taken the step of separating food waste for composting. These include Wesleyan University, Middlesex Hospital, Perk on Main, and Its Only Natural restaurant. The City has also begun a new program to collect food waste from Sanitation District restaurants.

Food waste makes up about 22% of what we throw in the trash. Landfilling and incinerating waste contributes significantly to climate change. By composting, we can grow healthier food, support healthier soils and ultimately, create a more just and sustainable world. So, let's all do it, Grow, Eat...Compost...Repeat!

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