



What can and cannot be composted

Avid gardeners know that compost can add vital nutrients to soil used in gardens, container plants and lawns. The fact that compost is so versatile and nutrient-dense may not even be its most admirable quality. Made from items used in and around the house, compost costs just about nothing to produce.

The raw materials that make up compost come from organic waste. These can be disposables from the garden and kitchen, as well as other areas around the house. According to the United States Environmental Protection Agency, yard trimmings and food scraps add up to 20 to 30 percent of the municipal solid waste in the United States. Turning waste into compost not only helps the landscape, but also the planet.

Compost is relatively easy to make, and there are scores of materials that can be put into compost. But it is just as essential to know which ingredients cannot be used in compost.

OK for compost

Most organic materials, or items that were once living, can be used in compost. Plant-based items used in cooking, such as potato peelings, carrot skins, banana peels, cocoa hulls, coffee grounds and filters, corn cobs, apple cores, egg shells, fruit peels, kelp, and nut shells, can be added to compost.

Other items from around the house, like unused kitty litter, hair, shredded newspapers and cardboard, leaves, flowers, paper, pine needles, ashes, and sawdust, can be successfully added to compost. Stick to items that are not treated heavily with chemicals.

Should not be used in compost

Inorganic and non-biodegradable materials cannot go into compost. These are items like plastic, glass, aluminum foil, and metal. Pressure-treated lumber, although a natural material, is treated with preservatives and often pesticides that can be harmful if they leech into the garden.

The small-gardening resource Balcony Garden Web indicates coated or glossy printed papers, such as those from catalogs, magazines, wrapping paper, marketing materials, and business cards, should not be added to compost piles because of the chemicals and inks used in these pages.

Planet Natural Research Center says to avoid pet droppings from dogs and cats. Animal products like bones, butter, milk, fish skins, and meat, may decompose and start to smell foul. Maggots, parasites, pathogens, and other microorganisms can form in the compost. These materials also may attract flies and scavenger animals. Plus, they decompose very slowly.

Any personal hygiene products should be avoided because they are tainted by human fluids and that can pose a health risk.

While weeds are not harmful in compost piles, there is the risk that seeds can germinate and then infiltrate garden beds when the compost is used. The same can be said for tomato plants and some other hardy fruits and vegetables.

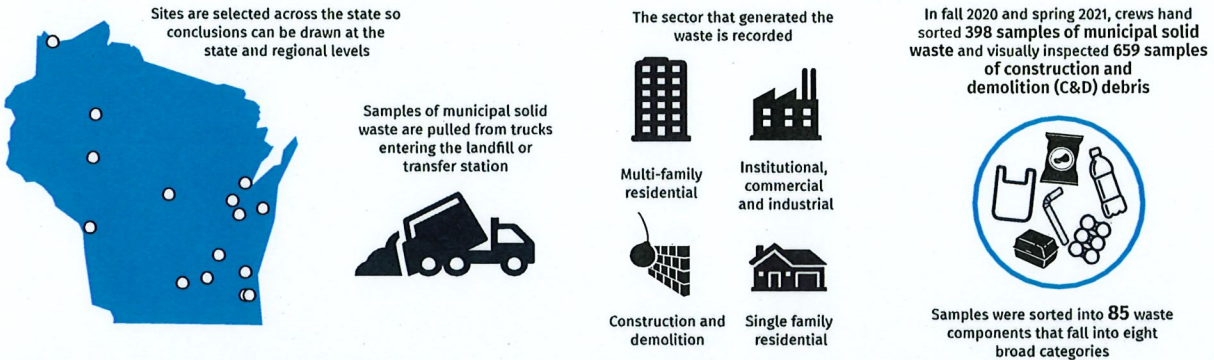
Compost is a winner in the garden and around the landscape. Learning which ingredients can and can't be added to compost piles is useful for any gardener. ■

What is ending up in Wisconsin landfills?

The DNR commissions statewide waste characterization studies to better understand what Wisconsinites are throwing in the trash. The most recent study occurred in 2020-2021. Prior studies were completed in 2002 and 2009. The results of these studies help guide waste reduction and diversion efforts at the state, regional and local level.

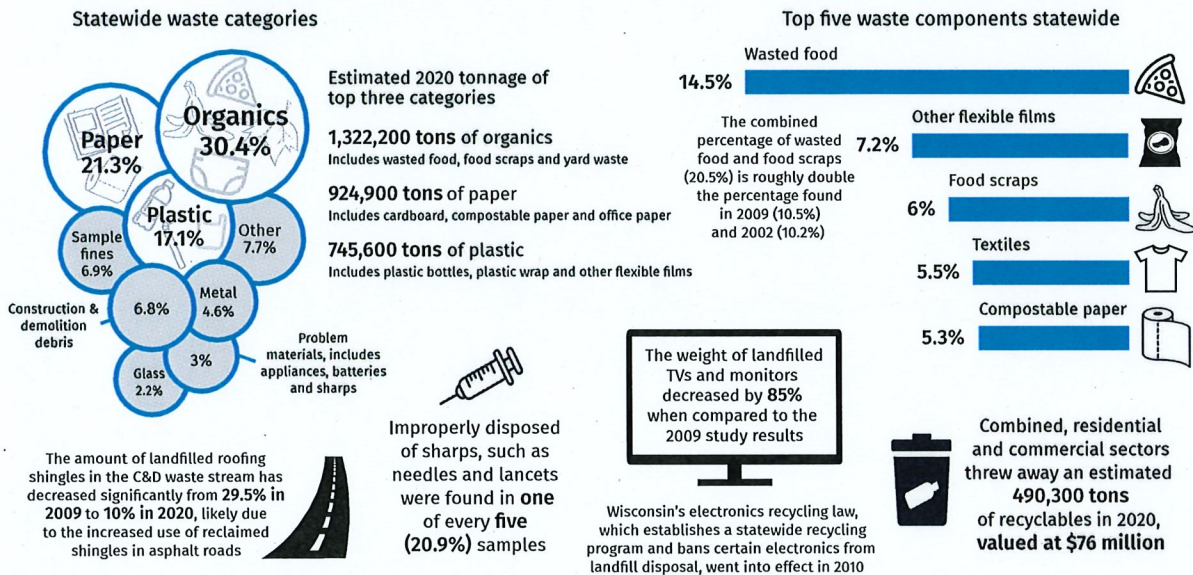
How we study waste

Waste characterization studies are snapshots in time that reveal the composition and amount of landfilled materials



What was discovered

Analysis of the 2020-2021 data shows us that Wisconsinites are dedicated to waste reduction, but there is more we can do



Reducing landfilled waste

Reducing what we throw away supports Wisconsin's economy, helps the environment and saves valuable landfill space

Organics make up roughly a third of the waste from single family and multi-family residences, meaning simple household practices can have a major impact on reducing the amount of organics in landfills



Using or composting the amount of wasted food and food scraps landfilled in 2020 would reduce as much greenhouse gas emissions as taking 592,035 passenger vehicles off the road for a year

Approximately 19% of landfilled waste could be diverted by households, businesses and institutions taking full advantage of existing municipal recycling programs throughout the state

Go to dnr.wi.gov and search "waste" to view waste reduction resources, access studies and reports and learn more about waste regulations in Wisconsin



Sources: Wisconsin Statewide Waste Characterization Studies, final reports published 2003, 2010 and 2021. This publication is available in alternative format (large print, Braille, audio tape, etc.) upon request. Email DNRWasteMaterials@wisconsin.gov for more information.



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Sustainability

Sustainability is when we do what it takes to keep something going, alive, healthy, safe and clean for a long time into the future so that there will always be enough of everything that everyone, everywhere needs to lead a good life in peace.

1. Take only as much as you need. Be a good citizen and conserve.
2. Take good care of what you have. Be a good steward.
3. Refuse | Reduce | Reuse | Reclaim | Repair | Repurpose | Redistribute | Recycle | Rot.

Think of the future.

I am thinking about how what I do impacts other people and the Earth, so...

<https://threesistersproject.language.iastate.edu/learn/>

YouTube videos on:

How to Take a Soil Sample = 3 minutes

How to Test Soil Health = 1.18 minutes

How to Complete the DIY (Do It Yourself) Aggregate Stability Test = 14 minutes

How to Complete the DIY Bulk Density Test = 11 minutes

How to Complete the DIY Water Holding Capacity Test = 17 ½ minutes

How to Complete the DIY Earthworm Abundance Test = 9 minutes

Also this is the link to a facebook page, entitled Three Sisters Gardening Project:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/363743951258912>

Previous workshops can be found under “guides” on the face book page.

Videos:

Native Gardening Workshop I = 3 hours

Native Gardening Workshop II = 2 hours & 10 minutes

Composting 101 = 2 hours & 10 minutes

Handouts/Slides:

Composting 101

3-Sisters Project Insects

DYI Soil Test



Easy Steps to Prevent Food Waste

Everyone is shopping smarter these days. It is important for the environment to keep food waste out of landfills where it produces methane, a powerful greenhouse gas.

Use these tips to save on groceries and help the environment.

1. Plan ahead



Before you go to the grocery store or order online, make a list so you don't buy more than you need.

2. Serve smart



Portion control is good for your waistline, and good for reducing plate waste.

3. Love your leftovers



Pack leftovers in small portions in shallow containers, mark the contents and date, refrigerate and use within 3 to 4 days or freeze immediately.

4. Compost, don't trash



Food scraps can be recycled into compost, an organic material that can be added to soil to help plants grow. Set up a home compost bin or drop your food waste at a local compost center.

Learn more about food loss and waste prevention at www.usda.gov/foodlossandwaste.