



TIP SAVINGS: \$120-\$150/YR

Avoided Emissions of CO₂: Up to 320 lbs./YR

\$USTAINABILITY \$AVINGS TIP

COMPOSTING: BREAKING IT DOWN TO THE BASICS

Easy steps to turn green waste into mulch

Placing organic mulches or compost around your plants is an easy and cost-effective way to ensure plants stay healthy, while also keeping weeds in check. Making your own organic mulch is as easy as setting up a compost bin in your backyard. Applying compost mulch to plants once or twice a year can reduce plant water needs by as much as 30%, while also making safe use of waste that would otherwise end up in a landfill.

**Mulch with
Compost and
save water, too!**

The composting process creates more efficient conditions for organic waste to decompose, and the end product is a rich soil amendment that can be used around your plants or in your garden. Not only can you use your kitchen scraps, but also your yard clippings, and other organic materials. Here are simple tips to follow:

COMPOSTING TIPS

1. Pick a spot for your compost pile that is convenient for you to access and close to a water source.
2. Layer carbon-rich materials (browns) to nitrogen-rich materials (greens). Layering helps to speed up the process and reduce odors. Here are examples:
 - Browns- Sawdust, chipped branches, leaves, shredded paper, used paper towels, and straw. If you have elms, ash, or pecan trees, you can bag up and use throughout the year.
 - Greens - Kitchen fruit/vegetable scraps, coffee grounds, eggshells, grass clippings, weed, or leafy trimmings.
3. To aid the decomposition process, the pile needs oxygen and moisture. Turn the pile occasionally to aerate and add water or any cooking liquids (pasta water, etc.) to keep the materials moist.
4. You know it is done when it smells earthy, and you cannot identify the original materials.



CHECKLIST FOR SAVINGS

- Mesa's Backyard Composting Program** provides compost containers (made from recycled trash bins) for a one-time \$5.00 fee. Visit www.mesarecycles.org or call 480-644-2221.
- Find books on gardening and composting** at City of Mesa Library, visit <http://www.mesalibrary.org>.
- Steps to successful composting** and tips can be found on the back of this flyer.

\$START \$AVING

Start saving by composting and doing your part for *building a sustainable community*. Visit our website for more sustainability savings tips at www.mesaaz.gov/sustainability.

Learn to live Green

Steps to Successful Composting

Once you have your composting container, you will need to select a location in your yard that is close to a water source, guarded from strong winds and preferably in the shade. Next, you should stack up the dry material and follow these 10 simple steps:

1. Break or cut all the material into pieces that are no more than 4 inches long. This exposes more surface so that microorganisms can break it down.
2. Dig out about two inches of dirt from the site in which you will be placing your container and then add a small layer of branches to the dirt to allow air to enter from the bottom.
3. Place a mixture of approximately four parts dry material (rich in carbon) for every one part of moist material (rich in nitrogen).
4. Place alternating layers of moist and dry material. Also, add a layer of dirt or manure every so often. If you are using food waste, make sure it is buried under the other layers to avoid problems with flies.
5. As you add your layers, water them to assure that the pile is completely moist. Note that the interior should be moist, but not wet. During heavy rains, cover the container with a plastic cover or lid.
6. Once the container is filled, cover the pile with two inches of dirt.
7. When decomposition starts, the pile will begin to heat up, with the interior temperature reaching as much as 160 degrees Fahrenheit. This high temperature is good because it kills the weeds and their seeds that may be in the compost mixture. Add extra coffee grounds or molasses mixed with water to speed up decomposition.
8. As the pile begins to cool back down so that it is the same temperature as the outside air, reactivate it by permitting air to enter the container. To do this, put the material into another container - or use a pitchfork to mix up the contents. It may also be necessary to add more water or plant material.
9. Repeat these steps as necessary until the material is dark and smooth.
10. To use the final compost material, sift the material with 1/2-inch sieve to remove the semi-decomposed larger pieces. You can return these pieces to the container to further decompose.

Problems & Solutions

Symptom * Problem * Solution

- **The pile has a bad odor.** It does not have sufficient air, or it is too moist. Open the pile to air and sun; add dry material.
- **The pile is dry and not reacting.** It is possible that the material is not sufficiently cut down; needs water. Add green material and reconstruct the pile, carefully follow steps 1-4.
- **The compost is moist and has a sweet odor but is not heating up.** The pile could be too small; needs nitrogen. Collect more material and combine it with existing pile, manure, or blood meal. Make a new pile at least 30"x30"x30". The pile functions best when at least 2 feet tall.
- **Many flies and ants.** Food materials are too close to the surface. Cover the pile with at least 2 inches of dirt or leaves.

Learn to live Green