

Saco Community Garden Compost System

The bin farthest from the shed is **Starter Bin #1**. It does not have a lid. Place non-diseased chopped plant materials in this bin. No string, plastic, sticks or other rubbish. Please take a few minutes to really chop the material. The smaller the compost material, the faster it will break down. Large pruning shears, typically used to trim hedges and such, are good tools for this task. Also, in order to avoid as much as possible the spreading of blight, no tomato plants or tomatoes in the compost system. Tomato plants and tomatoes need to be treated as rubbish and taken off site or put in the tomato barrel.

The next bin closer to the shed is **Bin #2**. In this bin, layer material from **Bin #1** (greens) with straw or chopped brown leaves (browns), when available. Use more browns than greens if possible. Add about 6" of greens and 12" of browns, and water lightly so the browns have about the dampness of a wrung out sponge. Repeat until the bin is full or there is no more material.

If no brown leaves are available, just fork the material from **Bin #1** into **Bin #2**. This will place the newest greens at the bottom of the pile. Water lightly after adding each 6"–12" of material.

Water the bin periodically so that the composting material is kept as damp as a wrung out sponge.

Avoid overwatering, as the air spaces in the pile allow aerobic (they need air) microbes to thrive and chomp up the material. At the same time the water allows creatures, aerobic and anaerobic (they don't need air) to more easily move through the material. Ideally, the compost in **Bin #2** should fill the bin initially to create a critical mass. As the material decomposes it will reduce in volume. When the material proportions, air and water are all good, the compost quickly heats up to about 160 degrees. If the compost smells like vinegar, it needs more brown leaves and more turning. Turn the pile every few days at least enough to mix the top 2 feet of material.

After about 2-4 weeks (less time if there are sufficient browns), the compost in **Bin #2** cools off and is ready to be moved to **Bin #3** (the next bin closer to the shed).

Fork or shovel the **Bin #2** material into **Bin #3**. Again, this mixes in air and moves the materials around so the compost creatures can work in different areas of the material. The material in **Bin #3** also needs to be watered to keep it as damp as a wrung out sponge, and should be turned every week or so. After about 1–2 months the compost in **Bin #3** will have reduced in volume, and will be more or less uniform throughout the pile. When this occurs the material is ready to be moved to **Bin #4** (the bin closest to the shed).

Fork or shovel all the material from **Bin #3** into **Bin #4**. The material in **Bin #4** doesn't need to be watered. Just let it sit for a couple of weeks and then sift it into buckets for renters to use in their gardens. Remove the inorganic rubbish that does not pass through the sifting screen. Please discard this material off site. Dump into **Bin #3** any chunks of compost that remain after sifting.

Prop the lids open and remove front boards when working in the bins, as needed. Replace the front boards and close the lids when done.



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♻️ Compost Sifting System ♻️

- 1) Place frame on green wheelbarrow
 - a) Taller boards along sides, shorter ones front and back
 - b) Bottom of frame surrounds top edge of wheelbarrow to hold frame in place
- 2) Place screen frame on wheelbarrow frame, deep side up
 - a) it fits between the sides of the wheelbarrow frame
- 3) Put a few shovels of unscreened compost into the screen frame
- 4) Slide screen frame back and forth on wheelbarrow frame. Sifted compost ends up in the wheelbarrow. Remainder can be emptied into another bin to finish composting (remove sticks, etc., first).
- 5) Put finished, screened compost in plastic buckets. Place filled plastic buckets in center walkway of the garden. Put sign “Compost Ready Help Yourself” into one of these buckets.
- 6) All renters may take and use this finished compost for their SCG plots.

Benefits of Compost in the Garden

- 1) Turned into the soil, compost returns nutrients to the soil, loosens soil and improves soil structure.
- 2) Used as mulch around plants, compost helps cut down on weeding and helps soil retain moisture.
- 3) Composting reduces waste and helps us all reduce the cost of garbage collection in our city.