



University of Northern Iowa

27% of the food we bring into our homes is wasted

The average American wastes **276 pounds** of food per year

33 million tons of food ends up in landfills every year

There are many different ways to compost at home.

There are tumblers, bins, heaps and pit composting methods that all accomplish the same goal.

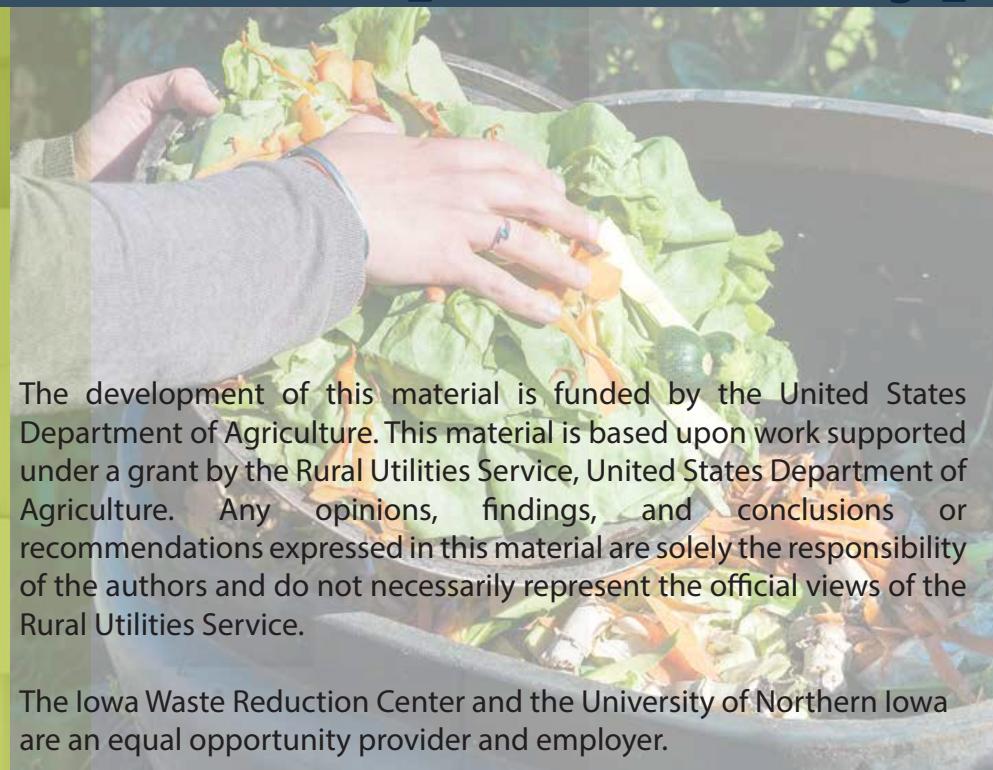
You can even buy worms to help you compost indoors.

Learn more about composting in your home and how to do it in this guide.

[residential composting]

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[the benefits of composting]

Composting is a great alternative to throwing your inedible food in the trash.

When done properly, it can become a valuable resource for your yard and gardens.

It is a simple way that you can make a positive impact on our planet for future generations.

Here are a few things that using compost can do:

- * Add nutrients to lawns and gardens
- * Suppress plant diseases and parasites
- * Decrease soil erosion
- * Increase water holding capacity
- * Kill weeds

While composting is a great way to handle the food you don't eat, the first step you should take in your home is to reduce the amount of food waste that you generate.

[reducing food waste at home]

Here are steps you can take:

[Inventory the refrigerator and freezer]

Before you shop, plan ahead to use what you already have on hand. As a rule of thumb, cook once, eat twice.



[Make a list before shopping and stick to it]

Don't go to the store hungry and avoid impulse shopping.

[Don't buy in bulk]

Too many times, bulk food purchases go bad before they are eaten.

[Find creative uses for food you would normally toss]

For instance, stale bread can make great croutons.

[When eating out, ask for smaller portions]

Many times, the restaurant will provide them at a discount. Take home leftovers for your next meal.

[Store food in a manner to extend its shelf-life]

Refrigerating, freezing or canning certain items make them last longer.

[composting]

It's a good idea to have 2-3 separate compost areas so you add food to one while the other ones are finishing.

The success of your compost pile depends on the following factors:

[Moisture]

Your compost pile should be moist to the touch, but you shouldn't be able to squeeze water out of a handful.

[Organic Materials]

Each item added to your compost pile has its own unique carbon to nitrogen ratio, but as a general rule of thumb, adding two parts greens [nitrogen] to one part browns [carbon] will get you close to the optimal ratio.

[Air]

To prevent unpleasant odors and to ensure proper breakdown of the compost, it should be turned regularly ensuring oxygen reaches the center of the pile. This can be done with a pitchfork or with a specialized "compost turner." The more frequently compost is turned, the quicker it will mature and be ready for use.

[Temperature]

Compost should feel warm to the touch except in the cold months. This heat will destroy pathogenic organisms and most weed seeds. The ideal temperature in the middle of the pile

[carbon] "browns"	[nitrogen] "greens"
Leaf Mulch	Foods Scraps
Nut Shells	Vegetable Scraps
Corn Stalks	Coffee Grounds
Pine Needles	Fresh Grass Clippings
Straw	Fruit Waste
Shredded Newspaper	Soil
Twigs	Seaweed
Sawdust	Dead Flowers



If the temperature rises above 160° Fahrenheit, beneficial microorganisms and bacteria will die and the pile could catch fire.

There are certain items that should not be added to compost because they will attract vermin and other animals to the pile. These items can also create bad odors. Some examples are:

KEEP OUT!



[other helpful hints]



Troubleshooting Composting Problems

[problem]	[cause]	[solution]
Compost smells like ammonia	Too much moisture or nitrogen.	Add more carbon materials [browns].
Compost breaking down slowly or not at all	Too much oxygen or carbon.	Add water and nitrogen materials [greens].
Compost is damp and sweet smelling but isn't heating up	Not enough nitrogen.	Add more nitrogen materials [greens].
Compost smells rotten	Too much moisture, over compaction, or food waste not mixed into the pile.	Add carbon material [browns] or add wood ash. Bury kitchen scraps and cover pile to keep out excess moisture.
Compost is too hot	Not enough oxygen.	Add a fluffing agent such as leaves. Turn compost frequently to introduce oxygen.