



# SCHOOL GARDEN COMPOST GUIDE FOR TEACHERS

## SORTING LUNCH WASTE

Assist students as they separate compostable items from any lunch waste. Compostable items include fruit and vegetable scraps, as well as paper products. Avoid meat, dairy, processed sugar, and oil. For a more detailed list, refer to the 2 sided Nourish compost cheat sheet signs (list provided below). These signs will be placed above designated green composting bins throughout the cafeteria on compost days.

### COMPOSTABLE ITEMS:

FRUITS  
VEGETABLES  
NAPKINS  
PAPER PLATES  
NEWSPAPER  
LEAVES AND STEMS  
ORANGE PEELS  
BANANA PEELS  
EGG SHELLS  
COFFEE GROUNDS  
BREAD AND PASTA

### NOT FOR OUR COMPOST:

PLASTIC UTENSILS  
(EVEN IF THEY SAY COMPOSTABLE)  
MILK CARTONS  
SODA CANS  
PLASTIC WRAPPERS  
SANDWICH BAGS  
ALUMINUM FOIL  
WATER BOTTLES  
MEAT AND FISH  
EGGS  
CHEESE  
PROCESSED SUGAR

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## COMPOST TUMBLERS AND BEYOND

The green compost bins should be emptied into compost tumblers after lunch, keeping the points below in mind while doing so. If tumblers are already full or if the volume of compostable waste exceeds the available space, excess can be set aside for collection by an offsite composting service.

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## GREENS AND BROWNS

Compost can be viewed as a combination of what we refer to as “greens” and “browns”. “Greens” include food scraps, fresh lawn clippings, freshly pulled weeds, and coffee grounds. They are high in nitrogen and break down quickly. “Browns” include paper, wood chips, dead leaves, straw, and other dried plant matter. They take longer to break down but provide needed structure and balance the greens to avoid a wet, smelly mess. When filling the compost tumblers, ideally you will have a ratio of 2 parts greens to 1 part

browns. The green bins will likely have more greens than browns (due to a high content of fruit and vegetables) in them, so you may have to add a handful of browns to the tumbler when adding your compostable waste from lunch. If paper is your main source of browns, consider tearing it up or putting it through a shredder before adding it to the compost tumbler. The smaller the pieces are that you put into the pile, the faster they will break down. It would be a good idea to keep a bin of shredded paper, or other browns, near the tumblers for easy access.

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## **INOCULATION**

Compost tumblers are isolated and sterile systems when new. They will need the addition of a scoop of healthy soil or finished compost to get the best results when starting the first batch of compost. This addition will inoculate your compost tumbler with microbes, such as good bacteria and fungi, that are responsible for the transformation of waste into finished compost.

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## **MOISTURE AND SPACE**

Too little or too much water can be harmful to the good microbes in your compost. Ideally your compost should be moist, not dry or soaking wet. This may require an occasional watering of the compost pile. It may also require you to add more browns if there is too much moisture, this could be indicated by slimy and smelly compost. Exposure to air is another important factor, do not overfill the compost tumbler, instead fill it about 3/4th of the way to allow for aeration during turning.

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## **TURNING**

Compost piles need to be regularly turned to ensure even and rapid breakdown. In addition to providing aeration, turning disperses microbes and exposes new food sources for them to feed on. Try to turn your compost tumbler a few times a week. You may notice warmth and even steam when the compost is turned. The microbes in your compost give off heat as they work to break things down. When your compost resembles soil and is cool to the touch, you have a finished product.

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## **FINISHING STRONG**

As compost breaks down, the volume within the tumbler will shrink. Adding additional waste is ok but will also prolong the time it takes for your compost to finish. From the time you stop adding waste to the compost tumbler, it may take 1-2 months for the compost to finish. If the compost does not appear to be breaking down after a few weeks, it could indicate that there are too many browns in the pile or that the moisture level is too low or that the tumbler needs to be turned more often. To correct this, add more greens or water the tumbler till damp or turn the tumbler more often during the week, respectively. Remove finished compost from the bin and place in a separate container for long term storage.

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