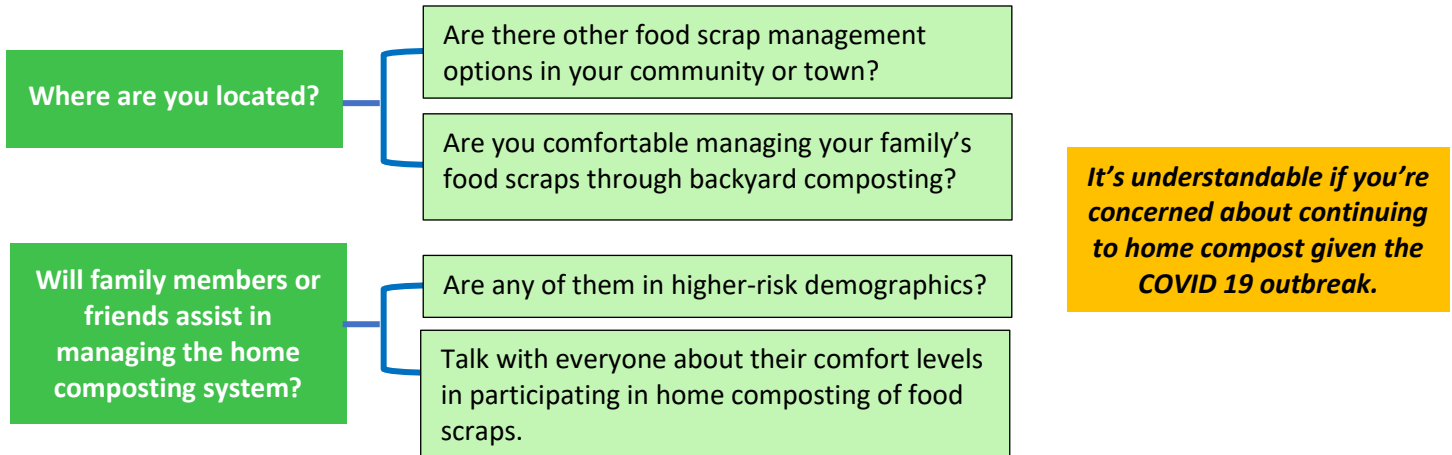


Health Precautions for Composting Food Scraps at Home

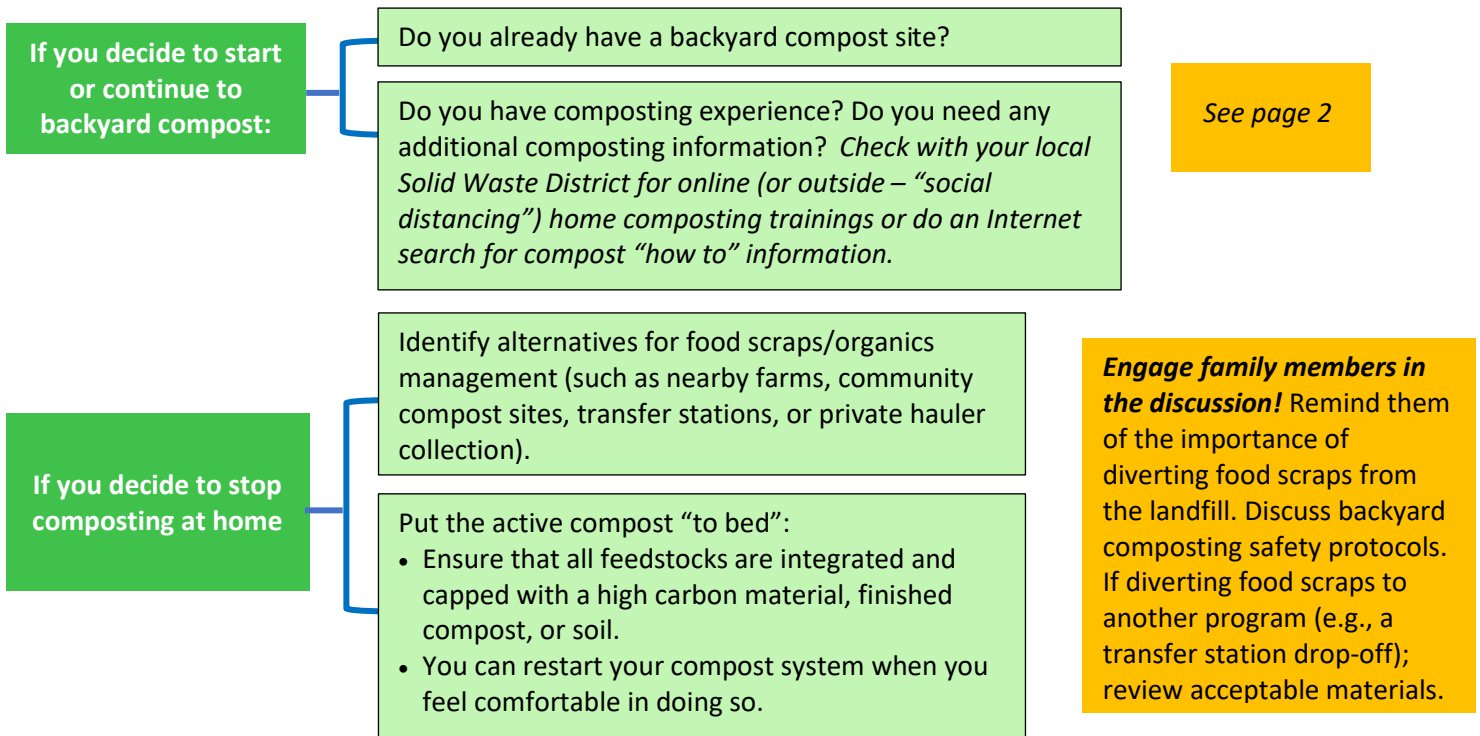
During this period of national emergency due to the COVID-19 pandemic, composting continues to keep organic resources local and makes a valuable soil amendment. Practiced safely, composting brings communities together while allowing social distancing, provides healthy outdoor activity, and fosters other positive activities, including gardening.

The following guidelines are intended for backyard or home composting sites where food scraps are composted:

1. Should you continue to operate your compost system during the Stay Home-Stay Safe/Shelter in place directives?

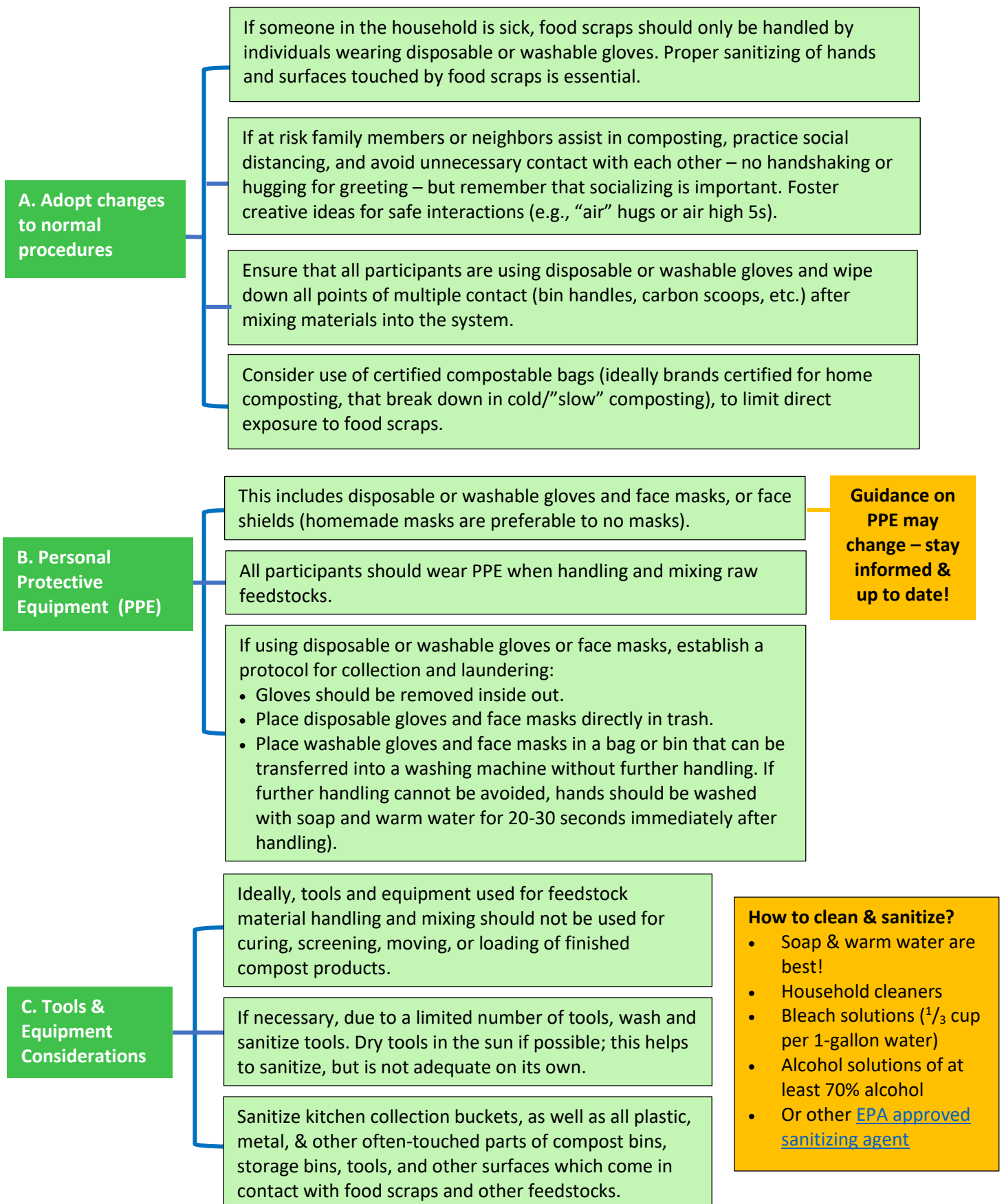


Consider the answers to these questions when making decisions about managing your backyard composting system.



This guidance is not intended to override local, state, or national directives. If you have additional questions about backyard compost precautions, please contact your local solid waste management program, health department, or composting association; specific health concerns should be addressed with your physician. The Food and Drug Administration has a [list of home cleaning products](#) and US EPA has a list of [approved disinfectants](#) known to kill Covid-19. This guidance document was adapted from a number of sources, including United States Composting Council (USCC), BioCycle, and compost experts.

2. If you decide to continue to compost food scraps at home:



D. Consider temporary changes to materials composted

Because coronaviruses may be more stable on cardboard, consider eliminating cardboard or paperboard as a feedstock.

As an additional precaution, eliminate tissues, paper towels and napkins. *If these materials were significant sources of carbon at the site, be sure to identify alternative carbon sources (sawdust, leaves, etc.).*

Do not compost disinfecting wipes. All wipes used in cleaning handles, compost bin lids, tools, etc. should be thrown in the trash. If washable rags are used, see guidelines for cleaning washable gloves.

E. Other things to consider

Make sure composters practice regular and proper handwashing (wash hands with soap and water for 20-30 seconds, or while singing the “Happy Birthday” song 2-3 times). If possible, have hand washing stations or sanitizers available outside so that trips inside the home are limited. Hands should be washed and sanitized prior to using the restroom, eating, and when taking a break or stopping work.

Composters should remove shoes and all PPE prior to entering the home. Clothes worn should be removed for laundering after compost-related work is completed for the day.

If possible, manage the home composting system so that temperatures rise (minimally 120 °F, ideally 131+ °F). Even if temperatures do not rise significantly, the virus will become inert in cold composting as materials decompose. Consult home composting resources for best management practices for **hot** home composting.

Regularly remind composters about wearing protective equipment, and use of sanitizers for cleaning hands, bins, tools, etc. If someone from outside your household comes to help you with your compost system, remind them about practicing social distancing and make sure that they understand and follow all of your safety protocols.

About Covid 19: Generally, the family of viruses that includes COVID-19 is less stable and are destroyed by oxidants, heat and sunlight. Research shows that “hot” composting (131+ °F) kills the other strains of coronaviruses quickly; the time that it takes materials to decompose in any system, including cold composting, allows for natural die-off. Therefore, handling feedstocks that may be contaminated with COVID-19 is the primary concern for composters. Accordingly, precautions focus on practicing good hygiene and using personal protective equipment, especially during the feedstock mixing and turning phases

Composting for Community Resiliency

Home composting is a vital part of community infrastructure. It allows us to take action for a sustainable future by reducing methane-generating materials (greenhouse gases) in landfills; control our own recycling of these local organics to make valuable soil amendment. With precautions and commonsense, home and community composting, along with other options for diverting food scraps (through transfer stations, curbside collection), can continue to be practiced. Each of us, of course, needs to be responsible for our own health, that of our family’s, and our community. *Prevention is the only meaningful strategy for containing this pandemic. This requires collective commitment to containment and transmission risk reduction. This is bigger than any of us individually; our actions affect our families and community.*