



Recordkeeping Essentials

Keeping accurate and detailed records is an important aspect of managing a compost system. They provide crucial feedback about how the system is working and information upon which to base decisions or take action. Everyone on the Compost Team should have an understanding of why these records are important and how to make accurate measurements. Good recordkeeping also ensures that if you encounter site issues or have neighbor complaints, the issue and any action taken is documented.

Record keeping essentials include:

- Number or name of the chamber, bin or pile.
- Name of the team member making the notes.
- Date and time when making notes.
- Moisture and odor ratings:
 - These can be a little subjective, but it's important that consistent and regular observations be made.
 - For moisture, the “squeeze” test is effective. Note if water, or additional nitrogen or carbon is added.
 - The odor rating often includes descriptors like “earthy”, “rank”, or “rotten eggs”. These are all important indicators for what the active compost pile needs, for example turning, aerating, or the addition of more water or high-carbon (“brown”) materials.
- Temperature: Recording temperatures is a way to document that the system is achieving high enough temperatures to foster the composting process and eliminate pathogens that may be present in the feedstock.
- There's also space to note if the pile/bin was turned or other actions taken.

Why Keep Records?

- ✓ It's an effective communication tool.
- ✓ It makes troubleshooting issues SO much easier. (Pro Tip: Sharing your logbook with someone providing technical support can be super helpful!)
- ✓ It's a sign that you are taking system management seriously, and can help resolve issues that may come up with neighbors.
- ✓ It can help in getting community grants for your site, as many grantors are interested in the volume of organics diverted from the landfill, and the volume of the resulting compost.

“Writing down what I did day by day, or whatever the regular schedule is, helps me remember what we've done. What motivated me to keep up with documentation is getting a handle on the proper mix of greens and browns so we could be consistent with what we input to maintain temperatures above 131 degrees for a minimum of three days. It gives us a record of what was input and how that affects the temperatures on a daily basis, allowing us to adjust accordingly. I looked back at last fall's documentation for the conditions when I'd gotten the compost up above 130 degrees, and again from earlier this spring when it was over 150 degrees. With teamwork, especially now with physical distancing, documentation lets us communicate among team members. Today when I took the temperature (156!) and checked the log, I saw that Caitlin, another Compostville team captain, had added gardeners' food scraps into the Jora last night.”

– Chris Adams, Compostville Team Captain, The Garden at 485 Elm, Montpelier, VT

Date	Time	Composter Name(s)	Moisture Rating	Odor Rating	Temp 1	Temp 2	Turned (Y/N)	Other Actions Taken

Compost Monitoring Log											
Pile Identification:			Pile Location:				Date Pile Built:				
Feedstocks and Mix Proportions:											
Date	Pile Temperature					Air Temp	MC	Odor	Visual	Notes (management, weather, vectors):	
	1	2	3	4	5						
	1'3"	1'3"	1'3"	1'3"	1'3"						

Two examples of logbooks that community composters use.

While there are several templates available online, and on the [Composting Association of Vermont's website](#) – modify them to make it your own, and give your site the permission to make updates to the templates if you find that people are writing extensively in the margins, or forgetting to note some key element.

Other Community Composting Tip Sheets to consult: [Science of Composting](#); [Systems & Operation](#); [Troubleshooting](#); [Be a Good Neighbor](#).

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