



Health & Safety Guidance for School Composting

When starting a composting program at your school, school administration, teachers, staff, parents, and even people in the larger community may have questions about the health and safety of the project. The following Health and Safety Guidance should be followed by all school staff and students, and volunteers involved with the collection of food scraps and onsite composting. When announcing or discussing the project with parents and guardians, consider sharing these guidelines.

Health and Safety Is Important at Your Site!

Composting can be a fun and educational experience that can involve students, staff, and parents. To make it a safe environment, address and reduce potential risks:

1. Protect those likely to be most sensitive. Involve the teachers, school nurse or physician, parents, and faculty/staff to discover any students or staff who may have allergies, be immunocompromised or be prone to infections that could make them sensitive to potential risks (remember to protect the privacy of medical information).

Control exposure of these individuals by restricting who comes in direct contact with the collection of food scraps or the onsite school compost system. Assign others to feed the compost bin or take samples. Do not stir or otherwise disturb the pile or bin when people sensitive to inhalation of allergens are nearby.

Remember: there are many roles that support a compost system; there is no need to exclude potentially health sensitive community members. Simply assign them roles that limit their direct exposure. Examples of acceptable roles include recording data, taking photos, sign making, writing project summaries, etc.).

2. Turning a compost pile will release airborne particles and gases that can cause symptoms in some people, particularly people with asthma or allergy issues. If a pile is turned, be aware of the wind direction and of the susceptibility of nearby individuals, including those doing the turning. Avoid turning piles on particularly windy days. Health sensitive students, staff, or volunteers should not turn the compost and should be cautious when handling finished compost.
3. Students, staff, and volunteers who monitor the food scrap collection, transport the collected food scraps to the compost area and/or add materials into the compost tumbler, pile, or bin, should wear appropriately sized non-latex, disposable gloves. Once gloves are removed, participants should wash their hands. Effective hand washing requires use of soap and sufficient time (sing Happy Birthday twice while lathering up).



- Maintain a properly managed compost system; monitor and record temperatures. If a hot compost system is properly maintained (reaching temperatures above 120 F°, preferably 131F°, for 3 to 15 days), the risk of pathogens is decreased.
- Making compost requires a mix of materials, some high in nitrogen (like food scraps) and others high in carbon (like sawdust, straw, and leaves). Keeping food scraps covered with high-carbon materials will minimize flies and dispersal of fungal spores.

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Ensure that the compost site has a sufficient stock of high-carbon materials for the proper balance required for the volume of food scraps brought to the site. A list of materials and their carbon to nitrogen ratios can be found at:

<http://cceclinton.org/resources/compost-home-composting-brochure#>

- Review proper tool use with all members involved in maintaining the compost system. It should be reinforced that tools are not toys and using them inappropriately can lead to injury. The appropriate tool should for the job should always be used, such as a pitchfork for turning and aerating compost. Tools should have an organized place where they belong and be returned after use.



Estimated Carbon-to-Nitrogen Ratios	
Browns = High Carbon	C:N
Ashes, wood	25:1
Cardboard, shredded	350:1
Corn stalks	75:1
Fruit waste	35:1
Leaves	60:1
Newspaper, shredded	175:1
Peanut shells	35:1
Pine needles	80:1
Sawdust	325:1
Straw	75:1
Wood chips	400:1

Adapted from [A Guide to Starting a Composting Program in Your School](#) by Green Mountain Farm to School. For more information, see <http://cwmi.css.cornell.edu/smallscaleguidance.pdf>.

Other Community Composting Tip Sheets to consult: *Health and Safety Guidance; Community Composting in the time of Covid-19.*