

School Composting Guide



One third of the garbage we throw away every day is organic waste. Schools can easily reduce this waste and get to half by composting. This guide is intended to help schools that are interested in composting get started.



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COMPOSTING 101

Composting is not difficult, it's actually quite easy. Here's some helpful information to get you started:

DECIDE ON A COMPOST BIN AND LOCATION

Purchase or build a compost bin (visit www.mmsb.nl.ca for build your own bin plans) and locate it in a sunny area with good drainage.

Tip: Make sure the location you choose is convenient and accessible all year round (even in the winter).

Tip: Locate "organics bins" to collect food scraps throughout your school in places where students, staff and teachers eat.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED - A QUICK CHECKLIST

- Teacher (to supervise the composting team)
- Small team of students (to run the composting program)
- Classroom monitor (optional)
- Outdoor compost bin
- A shovel or pitch fork
- Indoor organics bins
- Collection buckets
- Education materials
- Start composting

THE RECIPE FOR SUCCESSFUL COMPOST

1. **Food:** It's important to maintain a suitable carbon-to-nitrogen ratio, or brown-to-green ratio, in your compost pile. You can achieve this by adding your organic waste in layers of brown and green.

The following is a list of organic waste you may find in a school setting (for a complete list, visit www.mmsb.nl.ca):

Browns:

Dried leaves
Dried grass clippings
Woodchips and sawdust
Shredded paper and newspaper
Shredded boxboard and paper towel rolls

Greens:

Fruit peels and scraps
Vegetable scraps
Coffee grounds and filters
Tea bags
Fresh grass clippings

Avoid:

All meat products
All dairy products
Fish and shells
Bones
Fat, grease, oils and sauces

Tip: Each time you add your green waste, cover with a layer of brown waste like dried leaves, sawdust, shredded paper or boxboard.



2. **Water:** Your compost pile should be as moist as a wrung-out sponge. When you touch the pile it should feel damp but when you squeeze it no liquid should run out.

Tip: Add browns to absorb excess moisture and greens to add moisture.

3. **Oxygen:** For decomposition to take place oxygen must get to the bottom and centre of the pile. Turn your compost regularly to increase oxygen flow within the pile.

Tip: Turn the pile as food wastes are added – this will help the material to compost more quickly.

4. **Volume:** Your compost pile should be large enough to hold the heat generated through the composting process but small enough to let oxygen into the centre.

5. **Surface Area:** More surface area contributes to faster decomposition.

Tip: Chopping up materials before adding them to the bin will increase the surface area.

FIVE STEPS TO SUCCESSFUL COMPOSTING AT SCHOOL

Step 1 – Find your Champions

The Composting Team: responsible for collecting and emptying organic waste and maintaining the compost bin.

- Form a composting team with a dedicated teacher and a small group of motivated students.
- The teacher will help organize the students and provide support to the team as needed.

Tip: The team will work best if it's kept small enough that every member has their own task. Remember you can have a mix of grade levels in your group - even young students can play a role.

Classroom Monitor (Optional): Some schools find it useful to assign one student from every class to monitor the classroom compost container to make sure the proper material is being added.

Step 2 – Prepare your School

Outdoor Compost Bin: The first thing you need to do is either purchase or build your school an outdoor compost bin.

Tip: You can have the industrial arts class build the school a compost bin as part of their class project.

Indoor Organics Bins: You will also need a bucket or container in the staff room, cafeteria and in each classroom (optional) where students may eat their lunch or recess snacks. This container should be covered, clearly marked, and located next to the garbage container.

Tip: To keep the indoor organics bins clean, line each bin with newspaper - the newspaper can be added to the outdoor compost bin.

Tip: The organics bins will need to be rinsed occasionally to prevent odours – this can be done by a volunteer in each classroom.

Step 3 - Spread the Word

Educating your School: Inform teachers, students, and support staff that your school is going to start composting. Let them know where the indoor organics bins will be located and how they can participate.

Presentations: Presentations can be given by the school's composting team or by MMSB's team of waste reduction experts to help educate the entire school on composting.

Promotion: The composting team should also promote composting within the school.

Tip: The composting team can create their own posters, decorate indoor organics bins, and even come up with PA announcements to promote composting.



FIVE STEPS TO SUCCESSFUL COMPOSTING AT SCHOOL

Step 4 – Start Composting

Depending on the size of your school and the amount of organic material you generate, you will need to work out how often you need to collect the organics from the indoor bins and how you will organize the collection (1-2 times per week is usually sufficient).

The following is an example of how the composting team can get the job done in 20 minutes or less on composting day:

Team Meeting (4 mins)

- The composting team meets with the team teacher after lunch on Friday afternoon
- The team divides into groups of two and each group takes a large bucket with a handle to collect from the indoor bins

Collecting Organics (7 mins)

- Each group of two is responsible for collecting from a defined area (i.e. one group collects from all grade 7 classes and the staff room)
- The groups return to the meeting place with their buckets full of organics
- The team makes sure that only the proper materials are included

Adding to the Compost Bin (5 mins)

- Some team members return to class while the remaining members empty the organics into the outdoor compost bin (younger team members should be accompanied by the team teacher)
- The compost pile is turned (with a shovel or pitch fork) and leaves are added as necessary

Tip: Store fall leaves in a covered container next to the outdoor compost bin to make it easy to cover each layer of greens with a layer of browns.

Cleaning Up (4 mins)

- The collection buckets are rinsed and are stored along with the shovel at the composting team's meeting place

Step 5 – Using your Compost

Given our cool climate and short summer season, the composting process in Newfoundland and Labrador can take anywhere from one to two years. Finished compost, called humus, is dark and crumbly and has an earthy smell. You will know when your compost is ready when it takes this form and none of the original materials (food scraps) are visible.

Once your compost is ready, there are many uses. Here are some ideas you can try at your school:

- Use it on school grounds for naturalization projects
- Bag it up and give it away or sell it as a school fundraiser
- Use it on indoor plants at school
- Start a school vegetable garden

INFORMATION

For more information on composting organic waste at your school, contact MMSB:

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