

## Guidelines for Backyard Composting



According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, more than 33 million tons of food is wasted each year. Americans throw away up to 40 percent of their food, an average of 20 pounds per person a month. Much of this wasted food is actually surplus, wholesome and edible food that has recovery potential for those in need ([savethefood.com](http://savethefood.com)). When food is discarded in landfills, it produces methane, a potent greenhouse gas that contributes to climate change.

Backyard Composting is nature's way of recycling. Composting converts organic materials, including limited food scraps (fruits and vegetables) and yard waste trimmings (leaves, grass and small tree branches) into a dark, earthy-smelling soil conditioner, thereby preserving valuable nutrient-rich organic resources. Additionally, composting can save money by replacing store-bought fertilizers. Additionally, compost helps the soil retain, reducing water runoff. Composting can make a significant contribution to achieving waste reduction goals, especially if organic waste comprises a large proportion of your waste stream.

If you are interested in developing an onsite composting bin, first check with your local community or county waste and recycling coordinator to identify any restrictions on outdoor composting. A properly constructed compost pile is needed to minimize nuisances (such as odors and animals) to achieve a quality finished compost.

Composting is easy with some basic guidelines. To learn more about backyard composting and tips for success, watch SWANCC's video at [swancc.org](http://swancc.org).

## Acceptable Materials

### **Greens: Nitrogen-Rich Materials**

Grass Clippings Fruits and Vegetables Bread and Grains  
Coffee Grounds and Filters  
Paper Tea Bags (no staple) or Loose Leaves  
Chicken, Rabbit, Cow or Horse Manure Hair and Fur

### **Browns: Carbon-Rich Materials**

Leaves, Twigs and Small Branches Shredded Paper and Cardboard Rolls Sawdust  
Hay and Straw  
Wood Chips Egg Shells  
Dried-out Flowers or Plants  
Nut Shells  
Ashes (wood burning fi replaces)  
Dryer and Vacuum Cleaner Lint  
Wool or Cotton Textiles



## Unacceptable Materials

### Do Not Add:

Oils, Fats, Meats, Bones or Non-Biodegradable Materials  
Meat, Poultry or Fish Products and Bones Dairy Products  
Fats, Grease or Oils Pet Waste  
Soiled Diapers Plastic, Metal or Glass Charcoal Ash  
Large Wood Material  
Fire-starter Logs  
Treated or Painted Wood  
Waxed or Glossy Paper  
Synthetic Fibers  
Weeds, Diseased or Invasive Plants  
Black Walnut Tree Leaves or Twigs  
Yard Trimmings Treated with Chemical Pesticides  
Anything Not Biodegradable

Guidelines sourced from [epa.gov/compost](http://epa.gov/compost)

**Visit [swancc.org](http://swancc.org) for additional information.**



## Composting & Gardening Resources



### *Cornell University Waste Management Institute*

The Cornell Cooperative Extension puts research into practice by providing high value educational programs and university-backed resources for municipalities, schools, businesses and institutions.  
[cwmi.css.cornell.edu](http://cwmi.css.cornell.edu)

### *Home Composting Made Easy*

Step by step instructions, products and resources for backyard composting  
[homecompostingmadeeasy.com](http://homecompostingmadeeasy.com)

### *How to Compost*

[howtocompost.org](http://howtocompost.org)

### *Illinois Food Scrap Coalition*

[illinoiscomposts.org](http://illinoiscomposts.org)

### *U.S. Department of Agriculture*

[nracs.usda.gov](http://nracs.usda.gov)

### *U.S. Environmental Protection Agency*

[epa.gov/epawaste/conserve/rrr/composting/index.htm](http://epa.gov/epawaste/conserve/rrr/composting/index.htm)

## Workshops and Classes

### *Angelic Organics Learning Center*

Caledonia and Chicago  
(815) 389-8455 or (773) 288-5462  
[learn-grow-connect.org](http://learn-grow-connect.org)

### *Chicago Botanic Garden*

Glencoe  
[chicago-botanic.org](http://chicago-botanic.org)

### *Smart Farm*

Barrington  
[smartfarms.org](http://smartfarms.org)

### *The Talking Farm*

Skokie  
[thetalkingfarm.org](http://thetalkingfarm.org)

### *Urban Growers Collective*

[urbangrowerscollective.org](http://urbangrowerscollective.org)

## Products

### *Abundant Earth*

compost & worm bins  
[abundantearth.com](http://abundantearth.com)

### *Compost Bins & Supplies*

[hayneedle.com](http://hayneedle.com)

### *Flowerfield Enterprises, LLC*

vermi-composting resources  
[wormwoman.com](http://wormwoman.com)

### *Gardens Alive!*

[gardensalive.com](http://gardensalive.com)

### *Master Gardening*

[mastergardening.com](http://mastergardening.com)

Updated January 2019

**Visit [swancc.org](http://swancc.org) for additional information.**



## Composting Ordinance by Community

Backyard composting may be regulated by your community. It is important to follow the requirements in your relative code.

### *Arlington Heights*

All compost shall be maintained using approved composting procedures for gardening and landscaping purposes. The Arlington Heights Park District is exempt from these requirements.

- All compost shall be located in a compost container as permitted in this Section, unless the sheet composting method is being utilized.
- No more than three compost containers shall be allowed on properties of ½ acre or less.
- Compost containers shall be located only in the side yard or rear yard. For properties of ½ acre or less, such containers must be placed a minimum of five feet from the property line or 25 feet from neighboring dwellings. For properties in excess of ½ acre, such containers must be located a minimum of 25 feet from neighboring dwellings. Where a side lot line is adjacent to a street, any compost container must adhere to the setback requirement for the principal structure.
- Items such as, but not limited to, the following organic materials are allowed in the compost pile: soil, grass clippings, waste sod, wood chips, shredded paper, egg shells, coffee grounds, straw, leaves, cooked and uncooked fruits and vegetables. Small amounts of activators may be added to facilitate the process.
- Compost shall not contain household garbage, meat or any meat product, fatty food, bones, animal feces, diseased plants, treated wood, manure, or non-plant materials.
- Compost shall be maintained to prevent the harboring and breeding of animals and offensive odors by frequent turning of the compost material to permit aeration.
- Newer composting techniques or devices may be permitted if they are reviewed and approved by the Director of Building and Health Services, with the advice of the Environmental Commission.

[vah.com/assets/1/village\\_code/CHAPTER\\_19\\_02-12\\_Revision.pdf](http://vah.com/assets/1/village_code/CHAPTER_19_02-12_Revision.pdf)

### *Barrington*

Compost piles/structures are allowable in the rear yard provided they are not within 10 feet of any property line.

### *Buffalo Grove*

No specific regulations. Follow International Property Maintenance Code.

### *Elk Grove Village*

Compostable materials such as grass, trimmings, wood waste, leaves, weeds and other garden refuse may be placed in a compost pile, provided it is placed in such a way so the material will not be windblown. The depositing of garbage, pet waste, meat scraps or other materials that may attract animals or vermin to the compost

pile, or which may produce an obnoxious odor, shall be prohibited.

Compost piles shall only be permitted in rear yards, except that portion of the rear yard wherein a drainage easement exists, and in no case shall a compost pile be located in any side yard. Compost piles shall be no more than five feet (5') in height, and shall not have a maximum ground or base area of more than one hundred (100) square feet. (Ord. 2121, 8-14-1990) [sterlingcodifiers.com/codebook/index.php?book\\_id=636](http://sterlingcodifiers.com/codebook/index.php?book_id=636)

### *Evanston*

The following guidelines are intended to encourage good compost management techniques that accelerate the composting process, avoid nuisances and deter pests.

1. The City of Evanston endorses the composting resources shared by the Solid Waste Agency of Northern Cook County (SWANCC) on their composting webpage at <http://swancc.org>, which includes information from the University of Illinois Extension, Cornell Cooperative Extension, US Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA), Earth 911 and many others, to promote good compost management.

2. The City of Evanston considers the following materials to be acceptable for composting (source: USEPA):

- Greens (nitrogen-rich): grass clippings, fruits and vegetables, bread and grains, coffee grounds and filters, paper tea bags or loose leaves
- Browns (carbon-rich): leaves, twigs; shredded paper and cardboard rolls, sawdust, hay and straw, wood chips, egg shells, dried out flowers or plants, nut shells, wood ash, dryer and vacuum lint

3. The City considers the following as unacceptable composting materials (source: USEPA):

a. Meat, poultry, fish, bones, dairy products, fats, oils, grease, pet waste, soiled diapers, plastic, metal, glass, charcoal ash, large wood material, fire starter logs, treated or painted wood, waxed or glossy paper, synthetic fibers, weeds, diseased or invasive plants, black walnut tree leaves or twigs, yard trimmings treated with chemical pesticides, anything not biodegradable.

4. Siting and proper maintenance of compost bins and containers can be effective in deterring rat and other pest animal populations through identifying nesting areas, restricting available food sources and other population control efforts. Backyard composting in an urban area requires careful adoption of these techniques to discourage rats and other pests. See <http://cwmi.css.cornell.edu/nuisance.pdf> for more information.

5. Compost shall be maintained to prevent the harboring and breeding of animals and offensive odors. Good composting techniques to prevent odors and animal nuisances include, but are not limited to:

- constructing the compost bin out of hardware cloth or welded wire.
- locating the pile away from attractive animal nest locations like wood piles, carports, sheds or brush

piles and away from attractive food sources like bird feeders, pet food bowls, garbage cans, fruit trees or berry bushes.

- turning the compost pile and keep it moist to increase the temperature and speed up decomposition. This will also discourage animals looking for a dry undisturbed bed.
  - carefully observing the vents and other open areas of the bin to ensure food scraps are covered and that leachate is kept under control.
6. Compost bins and containers must be constructed in a way that deters animal pests like rats and other vermin. Rats are able to chew through plastic bins, often starting with the vents, and may burrow under and into your compost bin.
7. Recommended design features include:
- a solid frame that can be covered by half inch hardware cloth or welded wire. For instructions on building a welded wire bin see: <http://ccetomplins.org/compost/downloads/weldedwirebin.pdf>
  - cover the entire bin in 1/4 to 1/2 inch wire mesh.
  - ensure the bin has a tight-fitting lid.
  - provide adequate drainage by digging out the soil below the bin and laying 3 to 4 inches of coarse gravel.

<https://www.cityofevanston.org/government/departments/public-works/services/trash-recycling-and-yard-waste-services/backyard-composting>

### **Glencoe**

No specific regulations. Follow International Property Maintenance Code.

### **Glenview**

No specific regulations. Follow International Property Maintenance Code.

### **Hoffman Estates**

- Compost piles or bins may be located only in side or rear yards.
- Compost piles or bins cannot be placed or constructed in such a way so as to allow materials to be windblown.
- Compost piles or bins cannot emit odorous matter in such quantities as to be readily detectable at any point along lot lines, or so as to produce a public nuisance or hazard beyond lot lines.
  - A large amount of grass clippings or branches next to a tree is not compost or mulch. There are several ways to construct compost piles and many types of composting bins are available at retail establishments. Piles should be placed on level ground in a sheltered, well-drained area, out of constant direct sun- light. However, they should not be placed in constantly shaded areas, such as under trees. Be considerate of your neighbors and choose a spot out of direct view.

[hoffmanestates.org/index.aspx?page=172&title=Garbage+&+Recycling&top=1&title=Garbage+&+Recycling](http://hoffmanestates.org/index.aspx?page=172&title=Garbage+&+Recycling&top=1&title=Garbage+&+Recycling)

*Verify compost codes with your community for the most up to date information.*

### **Inverness**

9-1-4: LAND POLLUTION, REFUSE DISPOSAL AND COM-

POSTING: C. Compost Piles: 1. Definitions: For the purposes of this subsection, the following definitions shall apply:

**COMPOST PILE:** The location on the property where composting occurs in a heap, bin or container, provided, however, a compost pile of less than two (2) cubic yards in volume shall not be subject to the regulations and requirements of this subsection. A manure pile shall also be construed to be a compost pile.

**COMPOSTING:** The process of turning organic waste materials into humus. Temperature, moisture, ventilation and quantity of organic materials are factors necessary to the process. Domestic sewage or septage shall not be used in the process of composting.

**HUMUS:** The finished product of composting to be used for enhancing or renovating the soil on the property on which it was produced.

2. Composting Conditions: It shall be unlawful to maintain a com- post pile which:

- Emits a putrid or rancid odor; or
  - Attracts or harbors flies, rats or vectors; or
  - Consists of domestic sewage or septage, animal carcasses, cooking greases or petroleum products; or
  - Is located within one hundred feet (100') of any residence or residential structure or within fifty feet (50') of any public or private right of way, whichever is more restrictive; or
  - Is located within one hundred feet (100') of a watercourse, drainageway, flood plain, lake or pond; this provision shall not authorize a compost pile to leach or drain in the direction of said surface waters; or
  - Exceeds twenty four (24) square yards in ground area or twenty four (24) cubic yards in volume. (Ord. 91-427, 10-8-1991)
- [sterlingcodifiers.com/codebook/index.php?book\\_id=671](http://sterlingcodifiers.com/codebook/index.php?book_id=671)

### **Kenilworth**

No specific regulations. Follow International Property Maintenance Code.

### **Lincolnwood**

It shall be unlawful for any person to store any garbage, rubbish, junk or combustible refuse, except for the express purpose of hav- ing it collected by a duly authorized collector within a period not to exceed seven days. It shall be unlawful to place or permit to remain anywhere in the Village any building material, garbage or other material subject to decay, other than leaves or grass, or rubbish and other materials which can be blown away by the wind, except in a tightly covered, waterproof container or in a properly designed and used composting container or enclosure

[ecode360.com/15321885#15321885](http://ecode360.com/15321885#15321885)

## **Morton Grove**

7-6-10: Landscape Organics

Back yard composting bins are allowable for landscape waste disposal provided the composting bins are constructed under the following guidelines:

- a. Composting bins for the purposes of this chapter are defined as wire, wood or concrete block enclosures no larger than four feet (4') in diameter, and four feet (4') in height providing sufficient surface area for the controlled decomposition of landscape waste and other suitable organic material by aerobic bacteria.
- b. Compost bins in residential neighborhoods shall be located only on private property in rear yards behind the rear building line and shall be located no closer than twenty five feet (25') to any other residential structure and at least three feet (3') from any side or rear lot line.
- c. No person shall store or dispose of garbage in any residential compost bin in such a manner where odor is noticeable off site.

Under certain controlled conditions persons are also allowed to place accumulated grass clippings under shrubs or in gardens as a mulching material provided the depositor has the permission of the owner of property where landscape material are to be placed if other than the depositor's own property. Grass used for mulching purposes shall be placed so as not to accumulate greater than two inches (2") in thickness and shall be maintained so as to avoid perceptible odor during the decomposition process.

(Ord. 75-22, 10-13-1975; amd. Ord. 89-04, 2-13-1989; Ord. 89-08, 2-28-1989; Ord. 90-26, 3-26-1990; Ord. 92-15, 3-9-1992; Ord. 92-27, 5-11-1992; Ord. 96-16, 4-22-1996; Ord. 04-07, 2-23-2004)

## **Mount Prospect**

Chapter 21. A new Section 302.11, Compost Piles, shall be inserted to be and read as follows: 302.11 Compost Piles. Compost Piles shall not exceed a maximum size of four (4) feet tall by four (4) feet wide by four (4) long. Compost piles shall be located behind the principal structure and are not permitted within any required front or side yards. Compost piles must be located a minimum of five (5) feet from a property line. Compost piles shall be regularly tended to ensure the materials are properly decomposing.

[www2.moun prospect.org/WebLink8/DocView.aspx?id=298025&dbid=0](http://www2.moun prospect.org/WebLink8/DocView.aspx?id=298025&dbid=0)

## **Niles**

Composting and compost piles. Yard waste materials from the premises and adjoining sidewalk and parkway may be placed in a compost pile, provided that such materials are placed in such a way as not to allow them to be blown by winds. The depositing of garbage, animal waste, meat, meat scraps or products, dairy products, or other materials that may attract animals or vermin or which may provide an obnoxious odor shall be prohibited. A compost pile shall not be placed in any required front yard as defined by the village zoning ordinance, and shall be set back a minimum of three feet from the side yard lot line, set back a minimum of five feet from any rear lot line, and shall not be located less than 30 feet from any neighboring residential dwelling structure. In no event shall a compost pile be located in any side or rear yard drainage or utility easement. A compost pile shall be no more than 36 inches in height, and shall not exceed a maximum ground area of 10 square feet. Section 302.4.1

[library.municode.com/showDocumentFrame](http://library.municode.com/showDocumentFrame).

[asp?clientID=11092&docID=0](http://asp?clientID=11092&docID=0)

## **Palatine – from Spring 2017 Newsletter**

- Size of compost bins should be limited to 4x4x4
- A maximum of three (3) compost bins will be allowed on residential properties. Bins need to be made of commercial grade material, and barrel type contains are also acceptable.
- Yard waste should primarily make up compost piles.
- Items that are prohibited include: Oils, grease and lard Meat, bones and fish. Dairy products. Human or animal waste Inorganic materials.
- All compost also are required to be enclosed in a freestanding compost bin and be maintained to deter pests.

Compost piles and bins are allowed only in rear yards of residential properties, and must be set back from 5-feet from rear and side property lines, and 25 feet away from neighboring homes. Other locations may be reviewed by the Director of Community Services Department.

[palatine.il.us/assets/1/code\\_of\\_ordinances/0-063-13\\_-\\_Sec\\_10-3\\_8\\_Compost\\_piles\\_and\\_location.pdf](http://palatine.il.us/assets/1/code_of_ordinances/0-063-13_-_Sec_10-3_8_Compost_piles_and_location.pdf)  
(Ord. #0-63-13 - Sec. 10-3.8)

## **Park Ridge**

No specific regulations. Follow International Property Maintenance Code.

## **Prospect Heights**

Properly maintained compost piles may be utilized by single-family units for gardening and landscaping purposes. Such may be located in the side or backyard, the farthest distance possible on site from neighboring residential structures, patios and swimming pools, a minimum of five feet (5') from the property line. Compost piles shall not contain household garbage and must be regularly maintained by turning the composting material to permit aeration and/or by application of chemicals to induce rapid decomposition and prevent offensive odors. (Ord. 0-90-26, 7-2-1990)

[sterlingcodifiers.com/IL/Prospect%20Heights/index.htm](http://sterlingcodifiers.com/IL/Prospect%20Heights/index.htm)

## **Rolling Meadows**

No specific regulations. Follow International Property Maintenance Code.

## **Skokie**

Composting Ordinance Amended in August 2017  
Section 86-17 of the Skokie Village Code

- Compost piles may contain yard waste organics and limited food scraps to include fruit peels, vegetable scraps, eggshells, and coffee grounds.
- Compost piles shall only be located in a rear yard, and shall be placed a minimum of 5 feet away from all property lines.
- Only compost containers that are sealed on all sides with holes smaller than 1/4" will be allowed.
- Residents can receive a \$25 rebate from the Village with proof of purchase of a commercially available composting container that meets standards.
- Compost piles shall be in compliance with all regulations set forth by the Village Manager.

### **South Barrington**

No specific regulations. Follow International Property Maintenance Code. To satisfy the appropriate zoning setback requirements, residents are to follow their zoning codes relative to their home, typically 25-35 feet.

### **Wheeling**

No specific regulations. Follow International Property Maintenance Code.

### **Wilmette**

Compostable materials such as grass trimmings, wood waste, leaves, weeds, and other garden refuse may be placed in a compost pile, provided that it is enclosed in a fence, box or other barrier or container equal in height to the compost pile and in a manner to prevent materials from being wind-blown. Said fence or box shall not exceed 100 square feet in area and shall not exceed five feet in height. The container shall be set back from the lot line equal to the setback for accessory buildings and shall not be located in the front or side yard, or on a drainage or utility easement. The depositing of garbage, pet waste, meat scraps or other materials that may attract animals or vermin to the compost pile or which may produce an obnoxious odor shall be prohibited.

Any compost pile shall be maintained in accordance with Illinois Department of Energy and Natural Resources guide entitled, "A Homeowner's Guide to Recycling Yard Wastes," (reference numbers ILENR/RR-89/03 and XO4628-650M-3-90) as hereafter may be amended from time to time, which is incorporated herein by reference. In the event of a conflict between said guide and the provisions of this code, the code shall supersede the guide and shall govern the maintenance of compost piles to the extent of the conflict. Failure to maintain said compost pile as specified under Section 7-7.4, shall constitute a nuisance as specified under Chapter 14 of the Village Code.

[amlegal.com/nxt/gateway.dll/Illinois/wilmette\\_il/chapter7refuserecyclingandyardwastedispo?f=templates\\$fn=document-frame.htm\\$q=%5Brank%3A%5Bsum%3A%5Bstem%3Acompost%5D%5D%5D\\$x=server\\$3.0#LPHit1](http://amlegal.com/nxt/gateway.dll/Illinois/wilmette_il/chapter7refuserecyclingandyardwastedispo?f=templates$fn=document-frame.htm$q=%5Brank%3A%5Bsum%3A%5Bstem%3Acompost%5D%5D%5D$x=server$3.0#LPHit1)

### **Winnetka**

No specific regulations. Follow International Property Maintenance Code

### **Examples of International Property Maintenance Codes**

- All accessory structures, including detached garages, fences and walls, shall be maintained structurally sound and in good repair.
  - All exterior property and premises shall be maintained in a clean, safe and sanitary condition. The occupant shall keep that part of the exterior property which such occupant occupies or controls in a clean and sanitary condition.
  - The exterior of a structure shall be maintained in good repair, structurally sound and sanitary so as not to pose a threat to the public health, safety or welfare.
    - All structures and exterior property shall be kept free from rodent harborage and infestation. Where rodents are found, they shall be promptly exterminated by approved processes which will not be injurious to human health. After pest elimination, proper precautions shall be taken to eliminate rodent harbor- age and prevent reinfestation.
    - All structures shall be kept free from insect and rodent infestation. All structures in which insects or rodents are found shall be promptly exterminated by approved processes that will not be injurious to human health. After pest elimination, proper precautions shall be taken to prevent reinfestation.
- <http://www2.bgky.org/assets/files/aqoB3Kn5.pdf> - 2015

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