

Feed Your Compost Cart with Food Scraps: Composting and Other Ideas about Food Waste

Greetings Neighbor,

Thank you for joining in our effort to increase food waste composting in Ann Arbor. You are receiving this letter because you have ordered and received a compost cart as part of a volunteer-driven effort of the Interfaith Council for Peace and Justice and the Ann Arbor Area Elders Climate Action Chapter, supported by a small grant from the City of Ann Arbor's Sustaining Ann Arbor Together (SA²T) program. We hope to make your composting experience easier and more effective by sharing some key ideas with you.

Even before you start composting—aim to waste less food!

Composting is great, but we'll save even more in greenhouse gas emissions and landfill costs if we cut down the amount of food we waste so we have less to discard in the first place. Estimates are that the average family of four could save \$1,600 to \$2,200 by cutting their unnecessary food waste!

There are lots of helpful ideas out there—choose the ones that fit you! Here are a couple of thoughts and two websites that can reduce waste and save you money!

- Use leftovers creatively
- Put food in your freezer if it is getting old
- Most foods can be safely consumed long after their “use-by” dates. Sell-by and use-by dates are not federally regulated and do not indicate safety except on certain baby foods. They are manufacturer's suggestions for peak quality.
- Try to avoid the “Costco effect” of buying more food than can be consumed before it spoils. Consider combining bulk purchases with a neighbor.

There are many creative sources available online for more tips, including:

- savethefood.com (National Resources Defense Council and the Ad Council)
- notasteforwaste.org (American Farm Bureau Federation)

Frequently Asked Questions about A²'s Food Waste Composting Program

How do I limit compost odors or keep the cart from being messy?

OUTSIDE

- Line the bottom of compost cart with shredded paper, newspaper, cardboard, or paper bags to absorb excess moisture, which causes odor.
- Sprinkle baking soda in compost containers, and spray the inside of cart with a vinegar/water solution.
- Store compost cart in the shade during warm weather if you can.
- Wrap extra-smelly food scraps in newspaper before placing in composter/cart or put in the freezer until collection day.

INSIDE

- Empty kitchen counter top composter frequently, and drain as much liquid as possible from food scraps before adding them to compost.
- Sprinkle baking soda in kitchen composter.
- Use a BPI-certified bag to line a kitchen composter. Better to cool food before putting it in this kind of bag since heat starts decomposing the bag!

What should I do with food waste during the off-season when compost is not collected?

The city's curbside compost collection begins in early April and ends in early December. To store your food scraps over the winter, prepare your cart by placing a layer of leaves (or newspapers/a pizza box) at the bottom of the cart. Generally, the cool weather will keep the food scrap decomposition dormant. But if the weather is warm and you sense odors, add a layer of leaves or some newspapers. In a pinch, adding a couple inches of dirt as a layer will sweeten the cart and discourage fruit flies until the first spring pickup.

What's a good way to store my compost before I put it in the cart?

You don't need to take out your compost after every meal or banana snack. There are several choices; think about what best fits your needs.

- **Counter-top compost containers** can be a reusable bowl, small plastic tub with a lid, or an old coffee can. There are commercially-available kitchen compost containers made of metal, plastic or ceramic—some with a charcoal filter—that are available in housewares sections of several local stores and online. You can put food scraps in the container loose, in a paper lunch bag, or in a BPI-compostable bag, which can be purchased at local stores such as Kroger or BGreenToday or online. **Never put regular plastic bags into the compost!**
- **Fridge or freezer** Some people store their food scrap container or bag in the refrigerator or freezer between trips to the outside cart.
- **Paper grocery bags or newspapers as wrappings.** Bulky watermelon rinds, corn husks, bones from a crowd, etc., are more easily stored in the compost cart than on your counter. Loosely wrapping in newspaper or inside a paper bag makes transporting to the cart easier and helps keep your cart cleaner.

May I still use paper yard waste bags for compost if I have a cart? What about bundled brush?

Paper bags can be used for leaves and bundled brush even if you have a compost cart, although the latter may be easier to use and is more efficient for the collection process. Food waste cannot be set at the curb in paper bags, of course, to avoid problems with critters. The weight and moisture of grass clippings cause bag breakage and they must be placed in the cart.

Branches up to 4' long and 6" in diameter may be tied with natural twine into bundles 18" in diameter and placed at the curb for collection.

You can get free city compost to use in your garden or flower and vegetable pots!

Six bushels/one cubic yard of finished compost or mulch is available from the Ann Arbor Compost Center on Saturdays, 8:00am to Noon during April, May, and June, for Ann Arbor residents. Residents must bring their own shovel and containers; check in at the on-site scale house with a copy of your water bill and your driver's license as proof of residency. The scale house operator will direct you to the location of free products. Please limit consumption to six bushels per household.

Ann Arbor's compost and mulch is sold and organics may be dropped off at the Ann Arbor Compost Center at 4150 Platt Road. Details for compost drop-off, compost/mulch sales and hours of operation are posted at <http://wecareorganics.com/annarborinstructions.htm>

City cart placement reminders (Important!)

- Trash, recycling, and compost carts must be placed to allow three feet between each cart and any other obstacles, such as utility poles, trees, vehicles, and other collection containers. This gives the arm of the collection vehicle the space it needs to grasp the cart and empty it.
- Carts should not be placed for collection beneath tree branches, wires, or overhangs lower than 15 feet.
- Owner must ensure that carts are not blocked (including by snow or vehicles) on collection days.

If one of these conditions isn't met, the city may not service the cart that week. Instead, the cart will be serviced the following week on the regularly scheduled collection day.

For further information contact either Jan Wright (janwrigh@umich.edu), chair of the Climate Change and Earth Care Task Force at ICPJ, or Joe Ohren (joe.ohren@gmail.com), chair of Ann Arbor Area Elders Climate Action Chapter.