

# Cooperative Extension

## Tompkins County

Compost Education  
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## Group Composting: Steps to Success

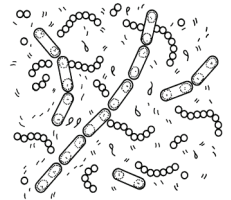
Whether you are a household interested in composting with others, a school that would like to compost food waste, a small business looking to reduce trash costs or a housing unit that shares responsibilities, group composting may be for you! Chances are, if you are considering group composting, you have already thought about some of the potential *benefits*:



- Does wonders for the garden, trees & shrubs or houseplants
- Diverts waste from the landfill
- Often interesting & instructive
- Trash costs less & is “cleaner”
- Is easy, fun & feels good to do

However, it is equally important to consider the *costs*. Although there are many groups that have been quite successful, others have encountered problems that prevent them from continuing—or even worse—dissuade the group from trying again. This factsheet lays out ten recommended steps to successful group composting:

1. **Enlist support** from
  - like-minded compatriots in the group—you will be the movers and the shakers!
  - kitchen workers, maintenance crew or whoever manages the desired inputs
  - administrative people (principal, boss, house manager, landlord, etc...)
2. **Who is responsible** for your group’s compost system? No, really... when everyone is busy, away on vacation, graduated off doing better things, who will take the lead on managing the compost???
3. **What and how much** will you be composting? One effective way to do this is to conduct a “waste audit.” Measure the pounds (or gallons) of material generated in a day (or a week). This will help in calculating the number and size of bins required.
4. **Find a site** that is accessible, convenient, level, shaded, well-drained and discreet (but not hidden!).
5. **Plan a composting system** that will work for you. There are lots of options out there, such as: welded-wire cylinder bins, three-bin turning units, black plastic containers, barrel tumblers, and many, many more. Different composting systems produce compost at different rates and are designed to compost different amounts and types of materials.
6. **Learn how to compost** in a way that will maximize the benefits and minimize the problems. Key definition: *Composting is the process of **managed** decomposition.* It will happen on its own, but will be so much more pleasant and effective when managed properly! Proper management is the difference between quick, rich, easy, soil-building “black gold” and a stinky, pest-infected mess that no one (not even you) wants to deal with.
7. **Educate everyone** who will be using the system and **alert others** of your intentions. Schedule information sessions if necessary. Be prepared to **follow up** with reminders or to train new people.
8. Schedule a **work party** to prepare the site and/or build the bin.
9. Obtain all necessary **tools and materials**. (Don’t forget those dry “browns” stored next to the bin.)
10. **Schedule a grand opening!** Serve refreshments and have everybody symbolically layer those “greens” with “browns.” Congratulate yourselves on a good start!



Questions? Call the “Rotline” (272-2292) for technical assistance.

*The Compost Education Program is funded by the Tompkins County Solid Waste Management Division.*