

# Curing and Using 79 Elm Street Food Scrap Compost Questions & Answers



Butterfly garden at Dinosaur State Park used 79 Elm compost

## HOT COMPOST

### What is this stuff?

Congratulations! You have received a load of “hot” compost from DEP’s food scrap compost program in Hartford. No, this is not “soil” or “dirt”. What you have is a load of screened compost, which was made from food scraps, wood shavings, paper towels, water and air. It is pure organic material (i.e. no mineral components like sand, silt or clay). Although this batch has been composting for six months, some of the food scraps were put in less than one week ago, which is why it is still “cooking”.

### Can I use it now?

No, the high concentration of nitrogen may kill any seedlings and could damage mature plant material. The “hot” compost needs to cure (finish breaking-down) before it can be used.

### Where do I put it?

In a flat open area exposed to the elements that has well drained soils. Do not place curing compost near any drinking water wells or in areas that tend to pond. You may want to cover the pile after a month or so with a porous ground mulch to help prevent weed seeds that land on the pile from germinating.

### How long before it's “finished”?

When the micro organisms are through digesting the food material they will die off, the pile will have shrunk in volume and the pile will cool. Finished compost has the smell of a damp forest floor. This should take 4-6 months. A spring batch of compost can be used for fall plantings.

# FINISHED COMPOST

## Is it safe?

Yes, the source material was fresh wood shavings, food scrap, and food soiled paper products. Any disease organisms should have been killed during the heating phase of the composting process; however, we recommend that you use gloves to keep your hands clean when handling, just as you would when digging in your garden. Once the compost has “cured” for about 4-6 months, it can be used safely without harming plants.



Finished Compost “Black Gold”

## How do I use it?

Use your finished compost as top mulch; till it into the ground as a soil amendment; or mix it with soil and use as backfill for planting and potting.

## Where can I get more?

Your right, finished compost is truly “black gold”, and once you’ve used it, you’ll want more. It is high in microorganisms and nutrients, improves water retention, has plant disease-suppressing qualities, and is a perfect example of a recycled material that would otherwise have been burned in a trash plant. We are always looking for state parks that will appreciate the value of this recycled product and “close the loop” by using it in their gardens. Contact K.C. Alexander at (860) 424-3239 or [kathy.Alexander@po.state.ct.us](mailto:kathy.Alexander@po.state.ct.us) to schedule your next load.

## How Can We Make Our Own Compost?

Since we only produce about 1 yard of compost every 6 months through the DEP food scrap composting program, state parks can start making their own “black gold” by recycling the yard trimmings generated at the parks. Call K.C. Alexander at 860-424-3239 if you need technical assistance. You can also find a list of leaf compost producers on the DEP website at <http://www.dep.state.ct.us/wst/compost/listcsites.htm> and more information on composting on the Composting and Organics Recycling page at <http://www.dep.state.ct.us/wst/compost/comindex.htm>



The Composter behind 79 Elm Street



April '05 Compost Harvesters. From left to right: Commissioner Gina McCarthy, Ashley, Amber, Jim, Cliff, Liz, Rob, Pete, and K.C. (taking photo).