



Compost Quiz and Answers

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Compost Quiz

This quiz consists of 13 true/false questions. The answers, with explanations, are on the next page.

1. Composting requires a lot of time and expensive equipment.
2. Yard wastes, such as leaves or grass clippings, make up a relatively small proportion of total refuse from a typical household and need not be considered for recycling.
3. Moisture is necessary for the composting process to occur.
4. Disposal of solid wastes is a problem that should be dealt with only through municipal government action.
5. If you are throwing away grass clippings, you are throwing away money.
6. To compost grass clippings, you should just put them in a pile in a back corner of your yard.
7. To be a composter, you need to live out in the country, or at least in an area with plenty of yard space.
8. All kitchen scraps and garbage should be included in home or school compost systems.
9. Diseased vegetable and flower plants should NOT be composted in typical home or school systems.
10. Weeds heavily laden with seeds should NOT be composted in typical home or school composting systems.
11. A tightly closed bin or enclosure is necessary for the production of good compost.
12. It is a good idea to use compost for starting flower and vegetable seedlings and transplants indoors.
13. For the composting process to occur most efficiently, special microorganisms, hormones, and activators need to be added to the compost pile.

Compost Quiz Answers

1. False: Composting can be as simple as making a pile of leaves and letting it sit until it decomposes. At the other end of the spectrum are the commercial or municipal composting facilities that use heavy duty equipment for shredding, mixing, aerating, and moving the organic matter as it composts.
2. False: Yard waste makes up 20-30% of a community's waste. On average, each rural or suburban household produces about 6000 pounds of yard waste per year, which could easily be composted to produce a useful soil amendment.
3. True: Composting occurs best at a moisture content of 50-60% (by weight). A simple way to check the moisture content of your compost mixture is to use the "squeeze test". When you squeeze a sample of your organic matter, you should be able to squeeze out a few drops of water, similar to that from a damp sponge.
4. False: Each of us can play our individual part to reduce the volume of solid waste that we generate. Most kitchen and yard wastes can be recycled naturally through the process of composting. Composting at home or at a local community garden requires much less energy and is less expensive than bagging, hauling, and processing organic wastes at landfills.
5. True: You can save time and money by letting short grass clippings fall back to the lawn rather than bagging and discarding them. Clippings break down rapidly and provide nitrogen. If the clippings are long and heavy, they should be composted rather than remaining as clumps on the lawn.
6. False: Because fresh grass clippings are quite moist and high in nitrogen, they should be mixed with a drier, browner material such as autumn leaves, wood chips, or sawdust for composting. Otherwise, the pile may become anaerobic and smell bad.
7. False: Many people compost at the heart of inner cities, in community gardens or even on the roofs or balconies of schools and apartment buildings. Worm bins fit in small indoor spaces and can be used successfully in apartments or classrooms with no outdoor land.
8. False: Although most food wastes can be composted, in small-scale compost systems you should avoid grease, fat, bones, fish, and meat scraps. These materials attract dogs and nuisance animals, and often develop odors while composting. Fats are slow to break down and greatly increase the length of time required before compost can be used.
9. True: Diseased plants from the garden should not be used for compost if the compost is to be returned to the garden. Most diseases are killed by heating during compost formation, but unless the compost is turned frequently and allowed to remain unused for several years, some of these disease organisms may be returned to the garden with the compost.
10. True: Although most plants and their seeds are killed during composting, some can be returned alive to the garden with the compost. Most weeds that have been pulled or cut before developing seeds can be composted without problem.
11. False: Building a compost pile is not an exact process. It can be as simple as making a pile of leaves and garden clippings, or it can involve building or buying a bin or enclosure. If a bin is used, it should be designed to allow adequate air circulation.
12. False: Young seedlings and transplants are very susceptible to the disease microorganisms that are found in most soils and composts. To reduce the possibility of infection, it is best to use a commercially prepared sterilized potting mix when starting seedlings and transplants. It is very difficult to efficiently sterilize compost.
13. False: The microorganisms that are needed to break wastes into compost are present in great numbers in all garden soil. In fact, there usually are sufficient microbes floating in the air to start the

decomposition process. A few handfuls of garden soil added to the compost pile will ensure inoculation of the pile with microorganisms, eliminating the need to purchase any sort of 'compost starter.'
