

# On-Site Composting

## Composting Process

Composting is a process in which food waste and other organic waste are broken down under the presence of oxygen/air to produce compost. This compost can be used in gardens to grow vegetables and flowers. The composting process is done mostly by the composting microorganisms that are naturally occurring in waste. The key to successful composting is to ensure that these composting microorganisms have optimal conditions such as air and a good mix of food waste with other carbon rich material.

## Regulatory Obligations

If an obligated premises under the Food Waste Regulation decides to set up a composting unit on its own premises, it needs to ensure that there is full compliance with all of the relevant environmental and public health legislation. The operator must apply to its local authority for a certificate of registration<sup>1</sup> to authorise this activity, as this is a requirement of the Waste Management Act. It is also important that the status of the facility is checked in respect of the need for planning permission.

Separately from the Food Waste Regulations, strict hygiene-related legislation applies in Ireland to the handling of food waste in order to prevent animal disease. This legislation is supervised by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. This legislation not only prohibits the feeding of food waste to farm animals, it may also affect the operation of on-site composting.

Hotels, hospitals, prisons, pubs, schools and other similar institutions can compost food waste<sup>2</sup> on-site provided they:

- ▲ Do not keep pigs, poultry or ruminants on the premises;
- ▲ Only food waste produced on the premises is composted; and
- ▲ The compost produced is only applied on the land of the premises.

If the premises adheres to these conditions mentioned above, it does not need to be approved<sup>3</sup> by Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. Persons considering establishing an on-site composting unit are advised to contact the Animal By-products Division at the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to obtain a clear picture of the relevant legal requirements.

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1: Premises producing less than 50 tonnes of food waste per year will need a certificate of registration

2: This food waste must only be 'catering waste' as defined in Animal by-Product Regulations

3: The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is reviewing policy in this area as it applies to hotels and other similar institutions

## Best Practice Tips

- ▲ Have only one person responsible for the operation of the composting unit;
- ▲ Ensure the food waste is blended with other carbon rich materials such as newspaper, wood chips, garden branches and materials and this will help the composting process to work properly and to avoid smells;
- ▲ Make sure the blended food waste is turned regularly to allow the aeration of the material as the composting microorganisms need air to survive; and
- ▲ Composting should be undertaken in a suitable location to avoid causing any nuisance to neighbours.

## Types of Systems



In some instances, small guest houses and B&Bs may generate only a very limited quantity of food waste and, in some cases, the arrangements that apply to home composting may be suited to these situations. Details on home composting can be found on [www.stopfoodwaste.ie](http://www.stopfoodwaste.ie)

Hotels and other similar premises may need a larger on-site enclosed composting unit; which is typically the size of a small car. These systems typically operate by placing the food waste into them and by adding woodchips to ensure there is the right mix available for the composting process. Some systems mechanically move/mix the material to speed up the composting process and to achieve high temperatures to kill pathogens.



## Before you decide to purchase an on-site composting unit, you should ask yourself the following questions:

- ▲ How much food waste does the premises generated?
- ▲ Based on this volume of food waste determine what is the most economical method of treating food waste – (1) by composting on-site or (2) using a brown bin service provided by a waste collector
- ▲ Is there one staff person available to take responsibility of the operation of the composting unit?
- ▲ Is there enough land at the premises on which to apply the compost?
- ▲ Is there a suitable location to place the composting unit on the premises?
- ▲ Is the premises located in an urban area? If yes, it might be best to instead use a brown bin collection service.



## Recommendations

- ▲ Before you buy an on-site composting unit, it is recommended that you talk to an existing business that has an on-site composting unit. Contact your local Environmental Awareness Officer in your Local Authority to find a local business with an on-site composting unit.
- ▲ Recommended further reading- "Implementation of an Urban Community Composting Programme" Sarah Miller, Andy Wilson & Roger Warburton, Rediscovery Centre, c/o Ballymun Regeneration Ltd. Dublin 9. Environmental Protection Agency. This report can be downloaded on [www.foodwaste.ie](http://www.foodwaste.ie)

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