

# COMPOST

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## Compost On The Web

by *Ellen Levy Finch (who else?)*

Check out the following URLs:

- **Cornell Composting site:**

[http://www.cfe.cornell.edu/compost/Composting\\_Homepage.html](http://www.cfe.cornell.edu/compost/Composting_Homepage.html)

A wealth of information. Dig around. For example, there's a page in the On-Farm Handbook that charts the nitrogen & carbon in various compostable items:

<http://www.cals.cornell.edu/dept/compost/OnFarmHandbook/apa.tab1.html>

- **Worm Woman**

<http://www.wormwoman.com/acatalog/index.html>

- **Master Composter site**

<http://www.mastercomposter.com/>

Lots of interest to master composters; basic info, resources, book reviews, conferences.

- **Lost compost sites**

I've lost track of some sites that were pretty good—used to be a Rot Web site and others. If you have URLs for good ones, I'd like to know. Let me know at:

[elf@finchester.org](mailto:elf@finchester.org)

- **Compost Resource Page:**

<http://www.oldgrowth.org/compost/index.html>

A wonderful set of pages that includes lots of info on the composting process; a handbook on composting called "Backyard Magic!"; details about vermiculture, home, and large scale composting, composting toilets; even poetry! It provides this info by linking to lots of existing compost web pages.

This location includes a composter's forum, where you can post questions about composting and responses to those questions. Unlike e-mail messages, these messages are added to a single list on a web page, where anyone can view the history of a discussion at any time. You can go to the location noted above and find the forum from there, or you can go directly to the forum using:

<http://www.oldgrowth.org/compost/forum/index.html>

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## Ellen on the Internet:

You can download PDF of some of my handouts from:

<http://www.finchester.org/compost>

You can reach me at:

- [elf@finchester.org](mailto:elf@finchester.org).
- (408) 360-8800

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## Lightweight Compost Sifter

by Nelle Yvel Henif

To build a lightweight compost sifter, you will need:

- 3 feet of 24"-wide 1/2" hardware cloth
- 2 pieces of 22.5"-long 1/2" PVC pipe
- 2 pieces of 32"-long 1/2" PVC pipe
- 4 PVC 1/2" elbows
- 12 pieces of 5"-long easy-to-bend wire
- Wire clippers
- Pliers
- PVC cement (optional)

To build the sifter:

1. Using the pliers, bend under the wires along the cut edges of the hardware cloth. This protects you from scratching yourself on exposed wire ends.
2. From each corner of the hardware cloth, use the wire clippers to remove a 2"x2.5" rectangle, as shown in the diagram.
3. Roll each short end of the hardware cloth once around a piece of PVC pipe. Remove the pipe.
4. Create a PVC rectangle by assembling the 4 pieces of PVC pipe and the elbows. You can glue them together if you want to (they slip together better), but you can force fit them and still be successful.

5. Force the PVC pipe under the rolled-up ends of the hardware cloth. Tighten down the rolled cloth over the pipe.
6. Attach the long edges of the hardware cloth to the PVC pipe by wrapping a 5" piece of wire every 6" along the sides. Twist together the ends of each piece of wire to hold it in place.

## Dirt For Worms?

by an assortment of e-mailers

Here's a sample discussion from the compost e-mail list (circa 1996; I can't find the email list any more, either):

*The first person wrote:*

When using newspaper as bedding it is always a good idea to include some soil, several quarts to a gallon depending upon the size of the worm bin. In addition to your experience of countering odors, the worms need the grit from the soil to digest their food.

*I wrote:*

The cooperative extension (where I earned my Master Composter certificate) says that the worms don't need the dirt for grit; they get plenty of grit from the stuff you put in. I believe that none of the master composters here who are doing worm bins add any dirt ever and the worms still grind up that food and procreate like crazy.

I don't know that anyone has done a study on whether a worm bin with dirt does better than a bin without dirt, but my bins also seem to do fine.

*Jim McNelly wrote:*

Dr. Ed Neuhauser conducted studies on this question at Cornell in the mid 1980s. His observation as reported to me was that if the feedstock was devoid of mineral content and grit such as wastewater treatment biosolids, paper mill sludge, or other pure vegetable material, the worms performed better with about 5% soil added.

But if peat, manure, compost, or other materials which have been exposed to the soil are used, there is enough "background" mineral material for the worms.

But it is more than just mineral content, since paper can be over 20% clay, it is the particle size which is also important.

But all in all, the benefits of adding soil were marginal and did not seem to be worth the effort.

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