**COMPOST**

**Composting reduces the amount of food waste that goes into the landfill, decreases the amount of money the county spends on waste management, and eliminates the production of methane gas as the food waste decomposes naturally instead of in a landfill.**

To compost correctly you must establish conditions that will promote the decomposition of organic waste. Variable conditions include the amount of moisture and type of feedstock. Moisture comes from the rain. Generally in Tennessee we have sufficient rainfall to keep a compost pile moist. You can use a hose to add moisture if needed during a drought or if the compost pile is covered. Feedstock is made up of moist “green materials” such as fresh grass or lawn clippings, fruit and vegetable bits, and food that has passed the peak of ripeness. Green materials contain nitrogen. Feedstock is also made up of dried “brown materials” such as dried leaves, wood chips, straw, dirt or sawdust. Brown materials consist of carbon.

An easy recipe to remember for composting correctly is to add one part “green” and three parts “brown.” It helps to mix materials or layer them together. Oxygen is one of the necessary factors that helps compost decompose. Bacteria, fungus, worms and other bugs break down the waste into a rich humus that is full of vitamins and minerals. This rich soil is ideal for adding to vegetable or flower gardens to feed your plants. If the pile dries out it cannot decompose. If the pile is too wet, it will begin to stink and will be too soggy to decompose and will rot instead.

Designate a corner or section of your yard to be used for composting. You can last four pallets together to build a bin, or wrap wire in a circle. A bin that allows for good air circulation helps feedstock decompose rapidly. If you prefer to have a pre-made bin, Putnam County recently received a grant for compost bins and those are being distributed free of charge in the community to residents. To qualify for a free Earth Machine Composter ($99 retail value) attend a waste management class provided by the county to learn how to compost.

Steps to composting:

1. Designate an area to compost

2. Collect feedstock to compost

3. Follow the recipe.

4. Compost is ready when it shrinks to 1/3 of its original size.

DON’T ADD: bones, raw meat, or oil. These take longer to decompose and can cause your pile to stink. The smell of the meat can cause dogs or other critters to tear into the pile.

It helps to have two compost piles. One can be used to actively add feedstock. The other can be left to rest once the container is filled. Leave it to rest until it shrinks to 1/3 of its original size. Then it is ready for use. After emptying the bin begin the process again.