

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_



**“Leaf” It in Your Yard (Composting)**  
**Data Sheet**  
*page 1 of 4*



**Directions:** Use this sheet to record information as you conduct your research.

**Question:** What is needed to make a productive compost pile?

| Questions   | <p align="center"><b>Example Answers</b><br/>                     Researched answers may vary slightly.</p>   | Source                            |
|---|---|-----------------------------------|
| <p><i>General Information</i></p> <p>What is compost?</p>                 | <p><i>Organic matter, like leaves, sticks, grass, and table scraps (food), that is in the process of breaking down and returning to the soil.</i></p>                                       | <p><i>online dictionary</i></p>   |
| <p>What makes composting happen?</p>                                      | <p><i>Scavengers and decomposers break down matter by eating it and returning it to soil.</i></p>   | <p><i>Spencer’s Team News</i></p> |
| <p>What is decomposition?</p>   | <p><i>The process of matter breaking down and returning to the soil, air, and water.</i></p>  | <p><i>dictionary</i></p>          |
| <p>What are six or more things that can be put in a compost pile?</p>     | <p><i>Leaves, grass clippings, fruit waste, vegetable waste, shredded paper products (napkins, paper plates, etc.), coffee grounds, prunings, pine needles, straw, wood, sawdust...</i></p> | <p><i>Spencer’s Team News</i></p> |
| <p>What are four or more things that cannot be put in a compost pile?</p> | <p><i>Meat, cheese (especially chunks), oil, fat, grease, dog or cat manure...</i></p>  | <p><i>Spencer’s Team News</i></p> |

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| Questions  | Example Answers<br>Researched answers may vary slightly.  | Source |
|--|---|--------|
| <i>General Information</i>   |   |        |
| What is humus?   | <i>Rich soil made from compost.</i>   |        |
| How long does it take to make humus?   | <i>2 to 3 months (in warm weather).</i>   |        |
| <i>Building</i>  |   |        |
| What is a good size for a compost pile?  | <i>3'x3'x3' up to 5'x5'x5' (' = feet)</i>   |        |
| What is a simple and inexpensive container for a compost pile?                                 | <i>Wire fence, or just make your pile in a fenced corner of your yard with no container at all.</i> |        |
| How should the material in a compost pile be assembled to help decomposition to start quickly? | <i>Alternating layers (i.e., leaves, soil, grass; leaves, soil, grass...)</i>                       |        |
| How moist should the material be that is being put into a compost pile?                        | <i>As moist as a sponge that's been wrung out.</i>  |        |

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| Questions   | Example Answers<br>Researched answers may vary slightly.  | Source |
|---|---|--------|
| <i>Maintaining</i>  | <i>The pile should be turned with a shovel or pitchfork frequently (every two weeks or so).</i>                           |        |
| What should be done to allow air to get into a compost pile?  |   |        |
| How moist should the material be kept in a compost pile?  | <i>As moist as a sponge that’s been wrung out.</i>  |        |
| How can you add food waste to a compost pile without attracting unwanted insects and other animals? | <i>Always bury food waste in the middle of the pile.</i>  |        |
| <i>Harvesting</i>   | <i>The humus (rich, fine soil) will be dark, brown, and granulated (like coffee grounds).</i>                             |        |
| What will the compost pile look like when it’s ready to use?  |   |        |
| What are three or more uses for humus?  | <i>Use as a lawn fertilizer, garden fertilizer, flower bed fertilizer, household plant fertilizer, tree fertilizer...</i> |        |

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|---|---|--------|
| <i>Troubleshooting</i><br><i>What should you do if...</i> |   |        |
| Unwanted animals start showing up at your compost pile?   | <i>Make sure all food waste is buried in the center of the pile. Do not add more food waste until unwanted animals stop visiting.</i>         |        |
| The compost pile smells bad?                              | <i>Turn the pile more frequently and add dry material. There is too much moisture and not enough air getting into the pile.</i>               |        |
| The compost pile is dry in the center?                    | <i>Add water while turning the pile. This will allow moisture to be distributed uniformly.</i>  |        |
| The compost pile is damp and warm only in the middle?     | <i>Either you have humus (the pile has finished composting) or you need to add water while turning the pile to increase overall moisture.</i> |        |
| The compost pile smells sweet, but won't heat up?         | <i>Mix in something high in nitrogen, such as grass, manure, or fertilizer.</i>   |        |