Composting is a great way to cut down on waste and provide your garden with valuable nutrients! If composting is an option your school would like to explore, here are some tips to get you started. More detailed information can be found at epa.gov/wastes/conserve/composting.

**DO Compost:**
- Fruits and Veggies
- Egg Shells
- Coffee Grounds and Filters
- Tea Bags
- Nut Shells
- Shredded Newspaper
- Cardboard
- Paper
- Yard Trimmings
- Grass Clippings
- Dead Plants
- Hay and Straw
- Leaves
- Sawdust
- Wood Chips

**DON’T Compost:**
- Black Walnut Tree Leaves or Twigs
  *Release substances harmful to plants*
- Coal or Charcoal Ash
  *Release substances harmful to plants*
- Dairy Products and Eggs
  *Cause odors and attract pests and rodents*
- Diseased or Insect-Ridden Plants
  *May transfer disease/insects to plants*
- Fats, Grease, Lard, or Oils
  *Cause odors and attract pests and rodents*
- Meat or Fish (Including Bones and Scraps)
  *Cause odors and attract pests and rodents*
- Yard Trimmings Treated with Chemical Pesticides
  *May kill composting organisms*

**Onsite Composting**
This is typically one of the easier composting methods for schools and as long as food scraps are managed carefully odors and rodents should not be an issue. Onsite composting can be done in a pile or a bin, depending on how much you are composting and your preferred method.

**Pile**
- Select a dry, sunny spot for your pile, about 3ft. wide by 3ft. deep. You can fence in the pile if desired.
- Moisten dry materials as you add them to the pile, and be sure to bury fruit and vegetable scraps under about 10in. of other composting materials.
- You may notice your pile is steaming; this is good. It will heat up as things begin to break down.
- Cover the pile with a tarp or black plastic to prevent rain from leaching away nutrients. Black plastic absorbs heat from the sun, speeding up the composting process.
- When material is a rich, dark color, it is ready to use. This can take anywhere from 3 months to 2 years in pile composting. Regular turning of the pile with a pitchfork will keep this time period closer to 3 months.
Onsite Composting, continued

Bin

- Bins can be purchased or you can make your own by following these steps:
  1) Place a brick in the bottom of a large plastic garbage can and surround with woodchips and/or soil.
  2) Drill 1/2 in. diameter holes in the bottom and sides of a slightly smaller plastic garbage can. Choose size based on how much you will be composting.
  3) Place the smaller garbage can on top of the brick in the large can.
  4) Wrap insulation around the larger can and cover with a lid. This will help ensure that your compost reaches temperatures hot enough to decompose.

- Again, when material is a rich, dark color, it is ready for use. Bins typically take less time than piles and should produce compost-ready material in 2-5 weeks.

Vermicomposting

This type of composting uses worms to turn waste material into nutrient-rich castings (droppings). It’s practical for schools and provides another fun teaching tool for kids! It takes up less space than onsite composting, but it does require some maintenance to ensure the worms stay alive.

Worms: The Red Wiggler Earthworm (*Eisenia fetida*) should be used for Vermicomposting. These can be purchased in some gardening stores or ordered online.

Bin: Worm bins can be purchased or easily constructed from plastic tubs or built from plywood.

Bedding: You will need moist bedding for the worms to burrow in and to bury the food in; shredded newspaper, cardboard, or computer paper (with black ink only) work the best. Remember to moisten it before adding to the bin. In addition to shredded bedding, it’s advisable to throw in some soil or sand to help the worms grind up food in their gizzards.

Feed: Worms can be fed vegetable and fruit scraps, coffee grounds, tea bags (staple removed), stale bread, and indoor plant trimmings. Bury these scraps in the bedding, a little bit every couple of days.

Compost: The box will need to be emptied every 3 months or so. This can be a fun project for the kids to help with! To separate the worms from their castings, use a stainless steel gardener’s sieve. The worms will stay on top, while the castings fall through! You can then return the worms to their box with fresh bedding and food and take the castings out to the garden.

Educate: *Worms Eat My Garbage* by Mary Applehof is a fun book to use in elementary classes to help students understand vermicomposting.