Over coming barriers to starting a compost pile

1. **I don’t know what to do with the finished compost.** – Finished compost can be used in the garden, around trees and shrubs, top dressing lawns, and even as part of a soil mix for houseplants and seedlings. With all the benefits of using compost and the variety of uses most homeowners can’t make compost fast enough.

2. **I don’t have a compost bin.** – Bins are not essential, but they can be very helpful. Yard trimmings can be composted in a freestanding pile or in trenches. However, bins help keep piles neat, discourage animals, take up less yard space and are easier to turn than large spreading heaps.

3. **I don’t have time to turn a compost pile.** – Piles don’t have to be turned, but turning can speed up the process. Turning a pile with a pitch fork, garden fork or in a tumbling unit will fluff the pile up to allow more oxygen to reach the microbes and shift the undecomposed material to the center where composting occurs more rapidly. However a compost pile with a good ratio of browns and greens and moisture will still slowly compost without turning. Be sure not to add any diseased plants or weed seed to this pile as they are not destroyed.

4. **I have more yard materials than I can compost.** – You do not have to compost ALL your yard materials. Begin by composting the amount of materials you feel you will be able to handle. As your skills improve you can add more bins and even your kitchen scraps to your composting operation.

5. **Compost bins sold in catalogs are too expensive.** – Bins are not essential, but they can be very helpful. Yard trimmings can also be composted in a freestanding pile or in trenches. However, bins can help to keep piles neat, discourage animals, take up less yard space and are easier to turn than large spreading heaps. Check with your municipality or county to see if they sell compost bins at a reduced price. There are also many styles of home built bins you can make for a minimal cost.

6. **I am afraid my compost pile will smell bad.** – A properly managed compost pile will have an earthy smell. Bad odors can result if there are too many “greens” in a pile or the pile is too wet. Generally you can stop odor production by turning a pile and adding some coarse “brown” materials to the pile. Always cover greens with a layer of browns to control odors.
7. **I am concerned a compost pile will attract raccoons, dogs and other pests.** - Avoid adding food scraps such as meats, bones and dairy. Use a bin with top, sides and possibly bottom. Bury appropriate kitchen scraps 6-8 inches deep in the pile. Turn pile often to discourage any critters from making a home in your compost.

8. **I live in an apartment and do not have a yard for a compost bin.** - Consider using a worm bin to compost your kitchen scraps. Worm bins can be small enough to fit under the kitchen sink, or in a closet.

9. **I am concerned working with compost may make me sick.** - Many pathogens (disease causing organisms) that may be in your compost pile are also commonly found in garden soils and potting mixes. Washing your hands after handling compost or wearing gloves are good practices to adopt to protect your health. Be sure to not include meats, pet feces and plate scraping from people who are ill in your compost pile. (Cornell University has a fact sheet “Health and Safety Guidance for Small Scale Composting” that has more details.)

10. **I don’t know how to compost or what compost is.** - Compost is a humus rich soil amendment produced by the biological decomposition of organic matter. Compost improves soil and plant health, prevents erosion and holds moisture and nutrients in the soil. You can learn more about composting by checking out composting books from your library, using resources from the Internet, or by taking a class. Your local UW Extension office can also be a great place to start.