

# HARVESTING & USING YOUR COMPOST



## HARVESTING FINISHED COMPOST

**CURING** Your compost is almost finished when the original inputs are unrecognizable, having been transformed into a dark brown, crumbly soil product with a pleasant, earthy aroma. Even when the materials appear to be fully decomposed, allow 2-4 weeks for the compost to cure. The curing phase is a period of rest during which compost contents stabilize and mature. While curing, aim to keep the pile contents evenly moist, but do not add any new compostables.

**SCREENING** Once your compost has finished curing, it is ready to harvest. There may be a few chunks of woody material left in your finished compost, as these are generally slower to break down. Large pieces can be screened out and used as mulch or placed in the next batch of compost to continue decomposing. Screening can be done by hand or with the use of hardware mesh.

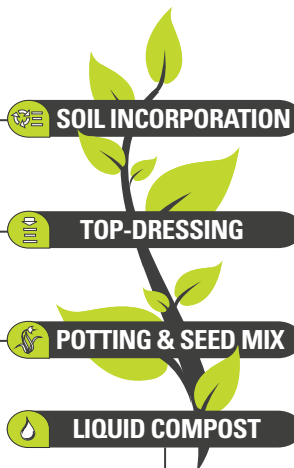


## USING FINISHED COMPOST

Mixing compost into soil helps to improve its structure, and increases nutrient levels and water holding capacity. Spread 2 to 4-inches of compost over the soil and turn it in with a shovel to a depth of about 6 inches. This is the most common use for compost.

Top dress your planters by spreading compost to a depth of 3-inches around the base of plants and shrubs, much like you would spread a mulch. For lawns, hand cast screened compost to a depth of 1/2 inch.

Finished compost is an essential addition to mixes for growing containerized plants, seedlings, or transplants. An adjustable recipe is: 20% traditional compost, 20% castings, 30% coconut coir & 30% sandy soil.



**SOIL INCORPORATION**

**TOP-DRESSING**

**POTTING & SEED MIX**

**LIQUID COMPOST**



## HARVESTING FINISHED CASTINGS

**VERMICOMPOST VS CASTINGS** *Vermicompost* is a mixture of worm castings and decomposed or partially decomposed organic matter that has not been digested by the worm. *Castings* are worm manure. If none of the original materials are recognizable, the bin composition is mostly castings, and is ready to harvest. Both vermicompost and castings are viable soil amendments.

**SEPARATING WORMS** Your finished castings will be ready to harvest in about 3-4 months. When harvesting, try to keep as many worms in the bin as possible. To separate your worms from the castings, place food in one area of the bin only. Most of the worms will migrate toward the food, leaving the rest of the bin full of largely worm-free castings. Start the process over by adding fresh bedding and food to the side of the bin that was just harvested. For more information on a variety of methods to harvest castings, visit [www.solanacenter.org/ciy](http://www.solanacenter.org/ciy)



## USING FINISHED CASTINGS

Worm castings are very nutrient dense- a little goes a long way! Castings are generally mixed into the soil at a 4:1 or 5:1 soil to castings ratio. Castings can be added to the bottom of a transplant hole, or worked into the soil surrounding established plants.

Castings can be added near the soil surface, but exposed castings will dry, harden and become less accessible to the root systems. Instead, crumble up the castings, and mix them into the surface soil.

Vermicompost and finished castings make excellent ingredients in mixes for growing containerized plants, seedlings, or transplants. An adjustable recipe is: 20% traditional compost, 20% castings, 30% coconut coir & 30% sandy soil.

The nutrients in compost and castings can be applied to plants in liquid form. *Leachate*, or liquid traveling through *unfinished* decomposing matter, can be diluted to the color of iced tea, and used as a soil drench. *Tea* is made by soaking or steeping *finished* compost or castings in water. Water your houseplants, transplants, and seedlings with the liquid to give them a good start and keep them healthy.

For more information on leachate, compost tea and worm tea, visit [www.solanacenter.org/ciy](http://www.solanacenter.org/ciy)