

# Composting Guide for the Floral Industry



Part of the American Floral Endowment's **Sustainabloom** Program

## Why Compost?

Composting is a way to divert green waste away from landfills, which create greenhouse gas emissions like methane. Finished compost can be used as a slow-release fertilizer source that can increase flower quality and yield. And you don't have to generate compost yourself — many commercial facilities exist that will accept waste and manufacture compost.

## Where to Start?

If you've decided to implement a composting program at your business, start by checking for local facilities that accept and manufacture compost. A good place to begin is the U.S. Composting Council, which evaluates facilities nationwide through the Seal of Testing Assurance (STA) Certified Compost program. This program requires compost manufacturers to follow federal, state, and local guidelines and submit regular samples for testing. Visit [www.compostingcouncil.org/page/participants](http://www.compostingcouncil.org/page/participants).

If you'd prefer to compost on-site, check with your state's Master Gardener program for tips on how to get started. Always make sure to test your compost for phytotoxicity and germination rates!

## Going Further

Once you've decided to start composting at your business, here are some additional tips to help ensure a successful program:

- Make sure compost bins are properly labeled and train staff on what can be considered green waste.
- Make sure waste intended for composting is free of plastics, rubber bands, and other packaging. "When in doubt, throw it out" is a common mantra to avoid contamination.
- Common compostable items include:
  - Stems, leaves, roots, and blooms
  - Growing medium
  - Paper containers and paper packaging



Look for the Seal of Testing Assurance (shown above) for a compost product. This seal means the compost is tested for pathogens and heavy metals, and a disclosure program exists with detailed physical parameters such as stability, maturity, pH, salts, and organic content. Any user can request the completed data sheet.

See acceptable ranges for flowers and vegetables:

[https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.compostingcouncil.org/resource/resmgr/documents/compost\\_use/Flowers\\_and\\_Vegetables.pdf](https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.compostingcouncil.org/resource/resmgr/documents/compost_use/Flowers_and_Vegetables.pdf)

## Guide For:

- Growers
- Wholesalers
- Retailers / Florists
- Transporters
- Suppliers

## COMPOSTING AT A GLANCE

Compost is created through the controlled decomposition of organic matter by microorganisms. The process results in a soil-like substance containing carbon and other nutrients that are beneficial to plant growth.

## HOW TO MEASURE

The most common way to measure floral waste diverted through composting is by weight. Try setting a goal for the amount of waste (either by weight or percentage of total) that won't end up in a landfill.

If you decide to apply compost as a fertilizer, note any changes in synthetic fertilizer requirements.

And don't forget to let your customers know your goals and progress!



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# Compost Application

## Benefits of Applying Compost

### 1 Builds Soil Structure

Compost can increase the retention of water in soil. For example, one study found a layer of compost increased the water-holding capacity by 2.5 times compared to the native sandy soil (Michigan State University Extension, 2015).

### 2 Improves Yield

In a study conducted on roses grown in a commercial greenhouse, the use of compost combined with fertigation improved soil fertility, flower quality, and yield (Idrovo-Novillo et al., 2019).

### 3 Appeals to Consumers

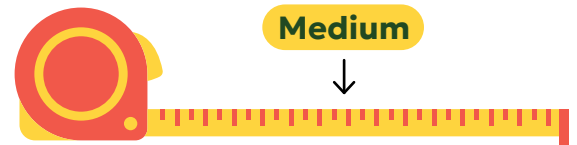
In a recent Floral Marketing Fund survey, nearly 60 percent of participants indicated a willingness to pay 10 percent or more for flowers sold by floral providers who compost their floral waste (Etheredge, DelPrince, and Waliczek, 2023).



### TIPS FOR APPLYING COMPOST

Find resources for your project — including recommendations for application method and amount — from the U.S. Composting Council: [www.compostingcouncil.org/page/HowUseCompost](https://www.compostingcouncil.org/page/HowUseCompost)

## Return on Investment



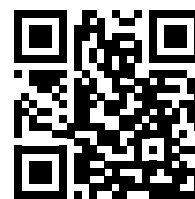
The costs of composting can be offset by fewer trash pickups and potential savings on synthetic fertilizer applications. Exchange programs also exist where green waste contributors can receive finished compost. Composting progress is also easy to market and communicate with consumers.

## Additional Resources

The United States Composting Council maintains a robust list of composting facilities and state regulations: <https://www.compostingcouncil.org/>.

Take a look at North Carolina State University Extension's Large-Scale Organic Materials Composting guide for more background on composting: <https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/large-scale-organic-materials-composting>

Thinking about compostable plastics? See our **Plastics Guide for the Floral Industry** (Guide No. 003).



Learn More  
**SCAN ME!**



Sustainabloom is an industry-wide program created by the American Floral Endowment to provide easy-to-use resources and educational guides around key areas of sustainability, including plastics use, composting, substrates, carbon accounting, and much more.

Visit [www.sustainabloom.org](https://www.sustainabloom.org)