

Municipal Compost 101

It's that time of the year when Springfield Township makes available for free to its residents black and brown gold: leaf compost as a soil amendment/weed barrier and pine mulch as a top dressing. The raw materials for these popular garden amendments comes from you, the residents of Springfield Township, through our Seasonal Leaf Waste Collection and Christmas Tree Collection Programs. The compost and mulch are available during daylight hours at the distribution area on Wissahickon Avenue, directly across from the entrance to Mount St. Joseph's Academy.

Through the years the Springfield Township Environmental Advisory Commission (EAC) has answered many questions about leaf mulch. The following is a brief summary of the most common questions that we hope you will find helpful as you find uses on your property for this valuable material.

1. Where does the raw material come from?

The material for the leaf compost comes from the Township during our Seasonal Leaf and Yard Waste Collection. The material includes leaves, yard and garden waste placed in approved biodegradable paper bags and placed at your curb by 7:00 a.m. on the morning of your regular collection day. It also includes Yard waste dropped off at the Township Public Works Yard on stated days, and loose leaf waste collection by vacuum machine and street sweeper.

The material for our pine mulch comes from the Township's Christmas Tree Collection Program. Township personnel grind our used Christmas trees into a woody top dressing for our landscaping.

2. Are there any controls or restrictions to what materials can be submitted?

Yes, acceptable materials include yard and garden waste only. The collection crews make a visual inspection of the bags and will leave them at curb if any debris is seen in the bag. It is important that residents do not place inappropriate debris in the bottom of the bags as it may go undetected and contaminate the final product. Ultimately, like the food we put into our bodies, our compost is only as healthy as what we put into it.

If weeds, invasive or diseased plants, seeds, stones, asphalt, materials sprayed with herbicides or pesticides, or pet waste, are placed into the bags for collection, these same materials will be found in the leaf mulch.

3. Where and how is our Leaf Compost Made?

The materials that are collected by the Township are processed on the grounds of the Morris Arboretum. Springfield Township employees process the materials using a tub grinder and other machinery. It should be noted that the Arboretum utilizes approximately 1/3 of the Township mulch in return for donating the space for processing the material.

The leaf compost is processed using the Windrow Method. The temperature and moisture of the windrows are monitored by the Township's municipal inspector. The inspector suggests when the

leaves should be turned and if and when water should be added. The windrows are turned over and run through the tub grinder at least two times before being distributed.

4. Is the compost or mulch tested in any way for contaminants?

No. The mulch is not tested for chemical composition.

5. Is the Township provided compost Organic?

Although the leaf compost is made from organic material, and processed by accepted windrow methodology, it is NOT certified Organic. Most common pesticides and chemical used in residential lawncare are eliminated by the temperature of the windrow process. No warranty or guarantees are given or implied by the township. Residents are welcome to use the material at their own discretion.

6. Why are there rocks, garbage and or occasional asphalt chunks in our compost?

Contaminants enter the mulch via residents placing them in the collection bags, from street collection, and via processing and distribution. Litter can also enter the pile on site.

Because the processing location is located partially in a floodplain area, permanent paving is not permitted without extensive stormwater remediation. During the processing operation the piles of leaf waste are moved by a front end loader and stones can inadvertently be introduced into the mulch. The Township does not intentionally place rocks or asphalt into the compost as a waste removal method.

The Springfield Township EAC encourages you and your family to begin your own composting program on your property. Many methods and tools are available to you from the internet and local hardware and garden centers. Periodic classes and seminars can also be found in the area. It is easier than loading the collection bags, and a great way to guarantee the quality of what goes into your compost, garden and you!

The Springfield Township Environmental Advisory Commission is a group of citizen volunteers working to make the township more sustainable. If you have questions for the EAC, call the township at 215-836-7600. The EAC meets on the fourth Wednesday of each month at 7 p.m. in the Springfield Township Building. Residents are encouraged to attend to share their views and help with any projects of interest.