

Dear Certification Specialist...

Dear Certification Specialist,

I have a couple of sad piles of discarded vegetables on my farm that I call compost. However, my plan for next year is to be more serious about compost. Can you explain the composting rules to me? Also can you let me know if I could use compost tea made from the compost?

Signed,
I-will-compost-it

Great! Many other certified growers make compost on their farms with good success. For organic certification purposes, there are two kinds of compost: compost with animal materials, and compost without animal materials.

Compost made without animal materials may be used without restrictions provided that it contains no prohibited materials. All ingredients must be either non-synthetic or synthetics approved for use as soil amendments (NOP §205.601)

Compost made with animal materials, such as manure, slaughter renderings, blood meal have to undergo a composting process. The NOP requires (NOP §205.203) that compost containing manure be produced following one of these methods:

- Compost must maintain a temperature of between 131° F and 170° F for three days using an in-vessel or static pile system OR
- Maintain a temperature of between 131° F and 170° F for 15 days using a windrow composting system, during which time the materials must be turned a minimum of five times.

If the compost does not meet these requirements, it is considered “raw

manure.” Raw manure must be incorporated into the soil no less than 120 days prior to the harvest of a product whose edible portion touches the soil (such as lettuce) or incorporated into the soil no less than 90 days prior to the harvest of a product whose edible portion does not touch the soil (such as corn.

Records of the composting process need to be kept, including what feedstock is being used, when compost pile is turned and temperatures including dates that the temperature was measured. Compost thermometers are available at garden supply stores and online. Make sure that the stem is long enough to accurately measure the temperature. Application timing and compost production methods will be verified during your annual inspections. If documentation is not available for composting procedure of purchased compost, and the grower wants to use it without a harvest restriction, they must re-compost the material and document the ingredients, additives, temperatures, mixing procedure and dates.

According to NOP 5034-1 Compost tea made from compost not meeting the requirements of §205.203(c) or NOP 5021 is subject to restrictions of §205.203(c) (1) for raw animal manure. This means that compost tea is only allowed if made from “veggie” compost or compost that has been finished according to the rules above. Because of food safety concerns it is recommended that all tea made from compost (made with or without manure), that also contains added nutrients (fertilizers, carbohydrates, etc.) be tested for pathogens if used on crops for human consumption.

Happy composting!

