What is composting?
Composting turns feedstock from your office into a product useful for gardening, landscaping or fertilizing office plants. Through decomposition of organic materials, your composting system diverts your office waste from the waste stream and turns it into a dark, loose, soil-like material.

A natural recycling system, composting keeps excess solid waste out of landfills and incinerators. Compost can be used as an excellent growing medium that enriches soil with nutrients and enhances soil structure. Composting can also reduce waste management costs for companies and top soil. It’s also a great way for you and your company to do your part in reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Doubling the composting and recycling rate in the U.S. would reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 42 percent!

Why do it at work?
The average American throws away 1,400 calories of food every day during meal breaks at work (cleanair.org). If you can’t finish your food or donate it to a local food charity, composting can help keep that food from piling up at landfills. Composting is an easy and fun office activity. Using feedstock, you can start composting today!

What is feedstock?
Feedstock is the combination of green and brown material that goes into your compost pile. The green material, such as food scraps or green grass clippings, provides moisture and nitrogen. The brown material, such as hay, brown leaves and shredded office paper, provides carbon and structure. The mixture of greens and browns fuels the composting process by breaking down carbon and nitrogen rich materials and turning it into a food for your indoor plants or outdoor landscape. Brown materials can come from your home or company’s front yard, local farms and municipal solid waste plants.

FAQ: An organic material means any material that was once alive, and in an office setting includes banana peels leftover from lunch or leaves from nearby trees. Compost use depends on your feedstock and system.

Glossary of Terms

**Compost** - The process of decomposition of organic materials under controlled conditions, (n) the humus-like material produced by decomposing organic materials under controlled conditions.

**Compost quality** - The suitability of a compost for a given use. Immature compost impairs seed germination or plant growth and is often considered low quality. However, while not suitable as a growing medium, it can be used as a mulch to prevent weed growth.

**Compost system** - The method used to convert organic wastes into a stable end product. Examples range from large outdoor windrows or piles to small indoor bioreactors.

**Organic** - (1) Pertaining to or derived from living organisms, (2) Chemical compounds containing carbon-to-carbon bonds.

**Organic matter** - Material that has come from something that is or was once alive.
Four easy steps to setting up a composting system at your office:

One: Get Buy-In and Create a Management Team
The first step in taking on any endeavor at the office is to make sure that everyone is dedicated to the effort, especially those at the top. Be sure to discuss composting at a full staff meeting, and make sure you have buy-in from your office community. Once everyone is on board, create an Office Organics Team (OOT) to oversee the project. These individuals will learn the ins-and-outs of composting, and will be responsible for making sure the compost systems are running smoothly. Management is key!

Two: Create a List of Materials and a Budget
From coffee grounds to leftover lunch, determine how much food your company tosses out each week and find a system which matches your needs. Weighing your waste in pounds will help you determine how large of a system you will need.

Three: Select a System
Tumbler, bin and vermicomposting containers provide unique benefits for your office. After you’ve determined how much solid waste you want to compost, select a matching system. Know your limitations and decide which system works best for you. Your office OOT will be in charge of measuring waste in order to show how much is being diverted and creating signage around the lunch room so that everyone knows what can and cannot be composted.

Four: Communicate with your Coworkers
Your OOT should lead mini-courses on composting in the office, educating coworkers on what and how to compost and the benefits to the office, the community and the world. Information about composting can be found at the Cornell Waste Management Institute (CWMI) Resources (cwmi.css.cornell.edu) and the U.S. Composting Council (compostingcouncil.org) websites.

Choosing a system:

Vermicomposters (Worm Bin):
For a small office of 30 employees or less, vermicomposters work best. A small vermicomposting system can take in a few pounds of food scraps each week, but larger systems compost more. As your worm population increases, so does its capacity. There are many ways you can manage your worm bin; try setting aside half of your bin for curing and the other to feed and house the worms. This is a good system as it ensures that there are no worms in your finished product. Your new friends will quickly become favorites around the office!

The Tumbler and Bin System:
For larger offices with more than 30 employees and a 4’ by 4’ space access to oxygen. You can cure compost. Every few days, flip the tumbler, giving the decomposing material access to oxygen. You can also try using the tumbler for feeding and the bin for curing. Simple and quick!

The SyracuseCoE Model:
As part of a SyracuseCoE initiative, EFC staff established a pilot on-site composting system at the SyracuseCoE Headquarters at Syracuse University (SU). An onsite composting system helps divert a large portion of on-site organic materials — from the building and surrounding landscape — from the Onondaga County waste stream.

EFC staff met with SyracuseCoE staff, other building occupants, and other SU staff — Perimeter staff, Physical Plant, Campus Sustainability — to discuss how to best establish a small-scale composting system at the SyracuseCoE Headquarters. SyracuseCoE organized a partnership with SU physical facilities to assist with gathering feedstock (yard waste) and with using the finished compost (on-site)

EFC staff set up an Office Organics Team (OOT), consisting of three staff members, who work together to manage and monitor two composting systems, a vermicomposting bin and a tumbler.

Three: Select a System
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Start composting!
Watch recycling at its finest as your compost system makes a fertile soil from the comfort of your cubicle.

FAQ: What about pile composting?
If your company has yard space, consider building an outdoor compost pile. However, since most offices do not have the space necessary for pile composting, we recommend using either a vermicomposter or tumbler.

Weigh your trash
Weigh the trash your office puts out each week and calculate how much you could keep out of landfills through composting.

Collect your brown materials
Contact your local municipal solid waste collectors and local farmers for feedstock. You can even collect leaves from your backyard!