# Righteous Rotting

***Composting with Confidence and Spiritual Prerogative***
**3 to 3.5 hours**
**Teenagers to Elders**

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**Program Overview**

This program is an in-depth exploration of composting- from basic biology to implementing systems on a home-scale. Participants will be guided through the Jewish spiritual significance of composting and principles of sustainability while having the opportunity to apply their learning by problem-solving in a "compost clinic" and constructing a functional compost bin.

**Enduring Understandings**
*to be shared during lecture component of workshop noted below*

- **Soil is the foundation of life- and the foundation of all land-based food production. Building healthy soil is the foundation of sustainable agriculture practice.**
    - Two Jewish creation stories- one cosmic, and one being "the farmer's" version- emerged from a people who lived close to the land.
    - Adam, is the masculine version of the word "earth" or "soil" (*adamah*). The name for the first woman, Eve (*chava*), comes from the word for "living." Soil and human life were considered to be intertwined.
- **Composting is essential for urban sustainability and a population-dense planet**
    - Most urban soils are nutrient deficient, contaminated, and compacted. Compost can improve soil conditions, and make soil when there is none.
    - Managing Food Waste and *Baal Taschiit*

- **Composting connects us to spiritual, ethical, and practical stewardship**
    - The second blessing of the *Amidah*, "*Michayei Hamettim*"
    - By designing systems for managing waste ourselves, we take our consumption into our own hands.

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**Goals:**

1) Share enduring understandings rooted in sustainability, spirituality, and ethics
2) Understand basic biology and chemistry of composting
3) Practice problem-solving common composting issues
4) Construct a home-scale composting bin system

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**Materials needed:**

- Copies of Facilitator Notes and Lesson Plan
- Copies of Resources for Participants
- Paper grocery bags
- “Active” compost pile(s)/system(s) for demonstration
- Samples of compost in (3) different stages of decomposition or from different sources
- Magnifying glasses
- Snacks: Apples, bananas, peanuts or pistachios in-shell. Water.
- Supplies for one or more of these models:
    - Stacking Milk Crates
    - Trashcan Model
    - Worm Bin (note that this could be another workshop)

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**Session Plan:**

Fire Starter/ Invitation (10 mins)

**Spectrum Activity:** Designate agree and disagree location in learning space- with open path between. Have participants line up between two designated areas. Start by providing *alternative conceptions* of compost- have participants physically position themselves between “agree” and “disagree” according to their belief. After providing a few prompts, take suggestions from group.

Introductions (15 mins):

Have participants share their names, gender pronouns, and two words that describe their relationship to compost.

- Share enduring understandings (outlined above)

Bridge to Lecture/ Exploration, Concept Invention

**Lecture content- led by facilitator:**

**Biological Learning, Ingredients to Compost Success** (30 mins)

*Start with observation:* Have participants break into small groups- Pass around compost samples in different stages- encourage using all 5 senses and using the magnifying glass to make observations. Share out to the larger group.

- Biological Process of Compost
    - Definition from USDA
    - Soil building: Compost-manipulated process- mimicking humus- decayed organic material in the soil. Compost enriches humus.
- Basic components of compost:

- Mix of carbon-rich materials and nitrogen rich materials
- Calculating Carbon/ Nitrogen Ratios
- Role of micro-organisms

*Recommended Bio- Break- 5 to 10 mins*

**Style your Pile** (30 mins)

- Passive vs. active piles
- Home systems
  - What to compost
  - Basic tenants of designing your own system
    - Balance of carbon and nitrogen
    - Air circulation
    - Moisture (?)
    - Keeping pests away
  - Stacking Milk Crates
    Trashcan Model
    Worm Bin (note that this could be another workshop)

Application (15 mins)
**Compost Clinic** (15 mins)
*Start with group-knowledge/ experience:* Ask if participants have issues or questions based on their piles or experiences. In this section, encourage participants to answer and problem solve each other's scenarios. Reference "Compost Intro" and the links incorporated below for the following common ailments.

*Bring the group to the present:* Gather around the compost pile on site to diagnose. Take note of action steps required, and save them for the "Compost Kavannah"

**System Build** (45 mins- 1 hour)
Choose one or more of the following models to build with your group
Stacking Milk Crates - we chose building two of these 3-tiered systems because of the ease of turning, delineation of composting stages, and vertical containment.
Trashcan Model
Worm Bin (note that this could be another workshop)

Reflection (30 mins)
**Snack and Conversation (15 mins)**
Note that individuals should hold on to their cores, peels, and shells for the reflection activity

**Composting Kavanah (15 mins)**
*(Adapted from Lily Chandler)*

This activity cycles participants back to the enduring understandings shared earlier, while providing space for individuals to process their learning into personalized action steps.

Evaluation
Have individuals fill out evaluation forms based on your organizational needs.

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**Anticipated Outcomes:**

- Participants will take home an understanding of basic biology and chemistry of compost
- Participants will take home an understanding of spiritual, ethical, and practical significance of composting
- Participants will have a concept of how to problem-solve with compost.
- Participants will have experienced building a composting system, and gain inspiration to replicate models in their lives.

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**References and Resources:**

Soil Permaculture Design and Maintenance
Compost Intro
University of California Divison of Agriculture and Natural Resources
*Calculating Carbon/ Nitrogen Ratios*

FAO SAVE FOOD Global Initiative on Food Loss and Waste Reduction
*Key Facts on Food Loss and Waste You Should Know.*

EPA Sustainable Management of Food
Reducing the Impact of Wasted Food by Feeding the Soil and Composting

Jewish Farm School. Alumot Resource Manual. 2003.

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