



# Cooperative Extension

## Tompkins County

Compost Education  
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### Cornell Cooperative Extension Tompkins County

## Volunteer Job Description

**Title:** Master Composter Volunteer

**Purpose:** The Master Composter Program supports the goals of the Tompkins County Solid Waste Management Division (TCSWMD) to divert compostable materials from the waste stream and thereby maximize waste reduction in Tompkins County. This is achieved by training and supporting community volunteers to educate and enthuse the public about the benefits and methods of composting.

**Anticipated Audience:** Volunteering as a Master Composter primarily involves working with adults. Many volunteers also work with youth, but usually on a more limited basis (i.e. giving a classroom presentation). Master Composters who work with a particular vulnerable population (youth, elderly or handicapped) for 10 hours or more per year will either require more screening, or a fully-screened volunteer or staff member will need to be present.

**Responsibilities:**

- Attend or coordinate meetings to plan events, share information, update progress on independent outreach, arrange field trips, etc.
- Plan and teach classes, give lectures, slide shows and demonstrations
- Set up and staff interactive displays at community events
- Manage or participate in demonstration site work (manage compost; maintain bins/site)
- Do research to update or create fact sheets and write articles for the public
- Provide technical assistance to friends, neighbors & coworkers
- Liaison/troubleshoot with on-site composting efforts – residential (single or group) and ICI (institutional/commercial/industrial)
- Advise teachers (school, day camp, etc.) on the design of compost curricula

**Expected Results:** Master Composters will promote the understanding and practice of responsible composting in Tompkins County through formal and informal interactions with the community.

**Training (TOTAL 40 HOURS):**

**Classroom Sessions (20 hours)**

Ten 2-hour classroom sessions are scheduled one evening per week for ten weeks in the late winter and early spring. Topics include: an overview of waste management and the special role of composting; the basic science of composting; techniques and strategies of education and outreach; compost systems and their management; and compost uses and quality. Presentations by university specialists, staff of Cornell Cooperative Extension of Tompkins County (CCETC) and TCSWMD, and veteran Master Composters provide varied and detailed instruction on both theoretical and applied aspects of compost education. To assist trainees in organizing the wealth of educational materials for future reference, a three-ring binder is provided.

*The Compost Education Program is funded by the Tompkins County Solid Waste Management Division.*

A deposit of \$40 is collected at the beginning of the training program to cover the cost of materials. This deposit is fully refunded upon completion of the volunteer's independent outreach commitment (See **Volunteer Work** section) - thereby making participation in the Master Composter Program FREE. (Note: financial constraints should not be a barrier to participation. See the Program Manager if the deposit would be a financial burden.)

**Practical Internship (20 hours)**

During training, the 20 hours of classroom instruction are matched by 20 hours of practical internship. This internship is completed during the training period in order to complement and reinforce the material learned in class. The internship involves working alongside the Program Manager and/or veteran Master Composters to prepare materials or participate in Program events such as community outreach, demonstration site work parties, classes and field trips. The Compost Fair - an event planned, organized and staffed by members of the training class (with much guidance from the Program!) - provides an excellent opportunity for new trainees to learn about compost education while acquiring the required practical internship hours.

**Volunteer Work (MINIMUM OF 40 HOURS):**

After completion of the 40-hour training program (20 hours of formal classroom training and 20 hours of practical internship), Master Composters match the Program's investment by returning at least 40 hours of **independent outreach** to the community. New volunteers may elect to take responsibility for an ongoing Program-sponsored event (i.e. coordinate composting efforts at the Ithaca Festival, plan/teach public classes at the Ithaca Community Gardens, etc.), or design their own outreach program, which may consist of one or multiple projects. Volunteers may work independently, or jointly with other volunteers or staff, on new or existing projects.

**Program Support:**

The Program Manager will meet with new Master Composters after training to ensure that their outreach is feasible and integrated into the larger Program mission. Thereafter, the Program continues to support Master Composters for the duration of their service. Communication between volunteers and the Program Manager will then occur in both directions - initiated at times by the Program Manager and at times by the Master Composter. Regular communication will occur as needed, but not less than once a year.

The Program Manager sends out information about upcoming events and outreach opportunities in which Master Composters can volunteer. Invitations to Master Composter functions and program updates will periodically be sent to all enrolled volunteers. At the end of each calendar year, usually in conjunction with year-end reporting, Master Composters with hours (>0) will be asked to decide upon their volunteer status (active, inactive or no longer enrolled) for the following year. Once inactive, Master Composters may reactivate by volunteering for scheduled Program events (i.e. staffing the education booth at Ithaca Festival or America Recycles Day).

**Reporting:** During training, verifiable records of **practical internship hours** are to be maintained. A record of these hours is to be submitted to the Program Manager at the final training session. Following training, and for the duration of the Master Composter's time with the Program, verifiable records of **independent outreach hours** are to be maintained. At the end of each calendar year, a record of these hours is to be submitted to the Program Manager. Volun-

teer hours reported (both practical internship and independent outreach) must reflect the promotion of responsible composting in Tompkins County.

**Time Commitment:** Each trainee is expected to attend all formal **classroom sessions** (20 hours). If a conflict arises, alternative means of instruction should be arranged promptly with the Program Manager. In tandem with the classroom sessions, each trainee is required to complete his or her **practical internship** (20 hours). Participation in the Compost Fair, which is held in late April, is mandatory.

The Program encourages new Master Composters to complete the subsequent **independent outreach** (40 hours) by the end of the year. To accomplish this, a new Master Composter would volunteer an average of 8 hours per month from May through December. However, depending on the nature of a volunteer's outreach program, it may take longer than one year. For that reason, volunteers are permitted to finish up their hours the following year (i.e. the year after the year of their training). After that, however, the opportunity (to earn back the training deposit) is forfeited. Master Composters that do complete their hours within two calendar years are conferred "veteran" Master Composters, earn their training deposit back, and may elect to remain active as community educators with the Program.

**Qualifications:** In addition to a basic interest in composting and community outreach, applicant qualifications include, but are not limited to, the following:

- curiosity to expand their understanding of the composting process
- enthusiasm to share their knowledge and skills with others
- good communication skills – verbal or written
- willingness to participate in a variety of Program-sponsored events
- ability to honor the minimum time commitments to the Program  
(See **Time Commitment** section for specifics)

All Tompkins County residents are eligible to apply. We invite anyone interested in becoming a Master Composter to contact us at CCETC. Trainee selection is made after completion of a written application and a personal interview. Individuals selected to begin Master Composter training will be asked to sign: a screening consent form for the NYS Sex Offenders Registry Check; the general CCETC volunteer agreement and code of conduct; and the Master Composter volunteer agreement.

**Benefits:**

- Acquire new knowledge and skills shared by composting experts
- Reduce waste and produce some wonderful humus for gardening
- Improve your teaching and leadership skills through community education
- Gain a personal sense of satisfaction by initiating community composting efforts
- Make new friends and work as a team with others who share similar interests

**Level of Background Screening Required:**

- Application and reference checks
- NYS Sex Offenders Registry Check