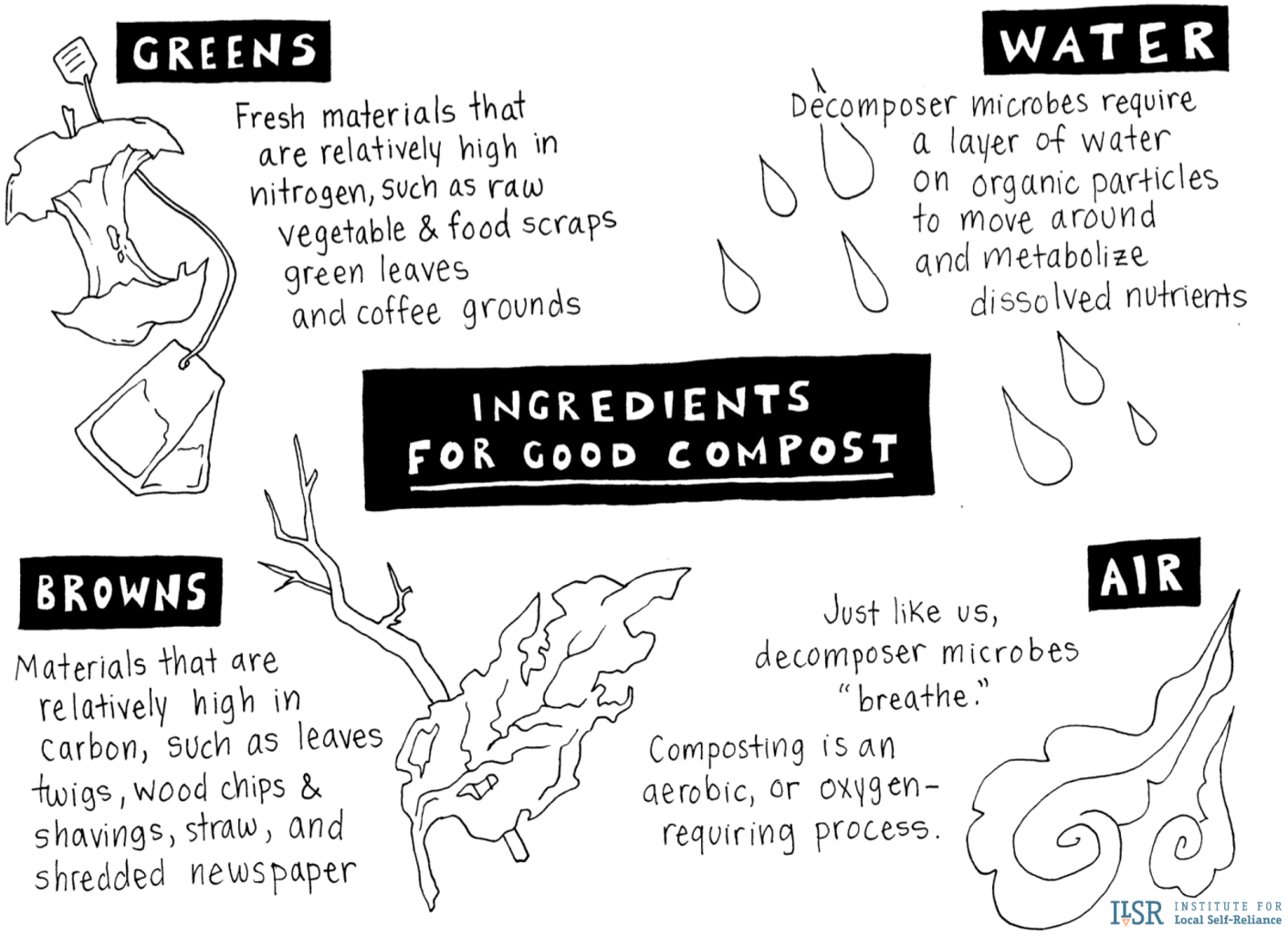
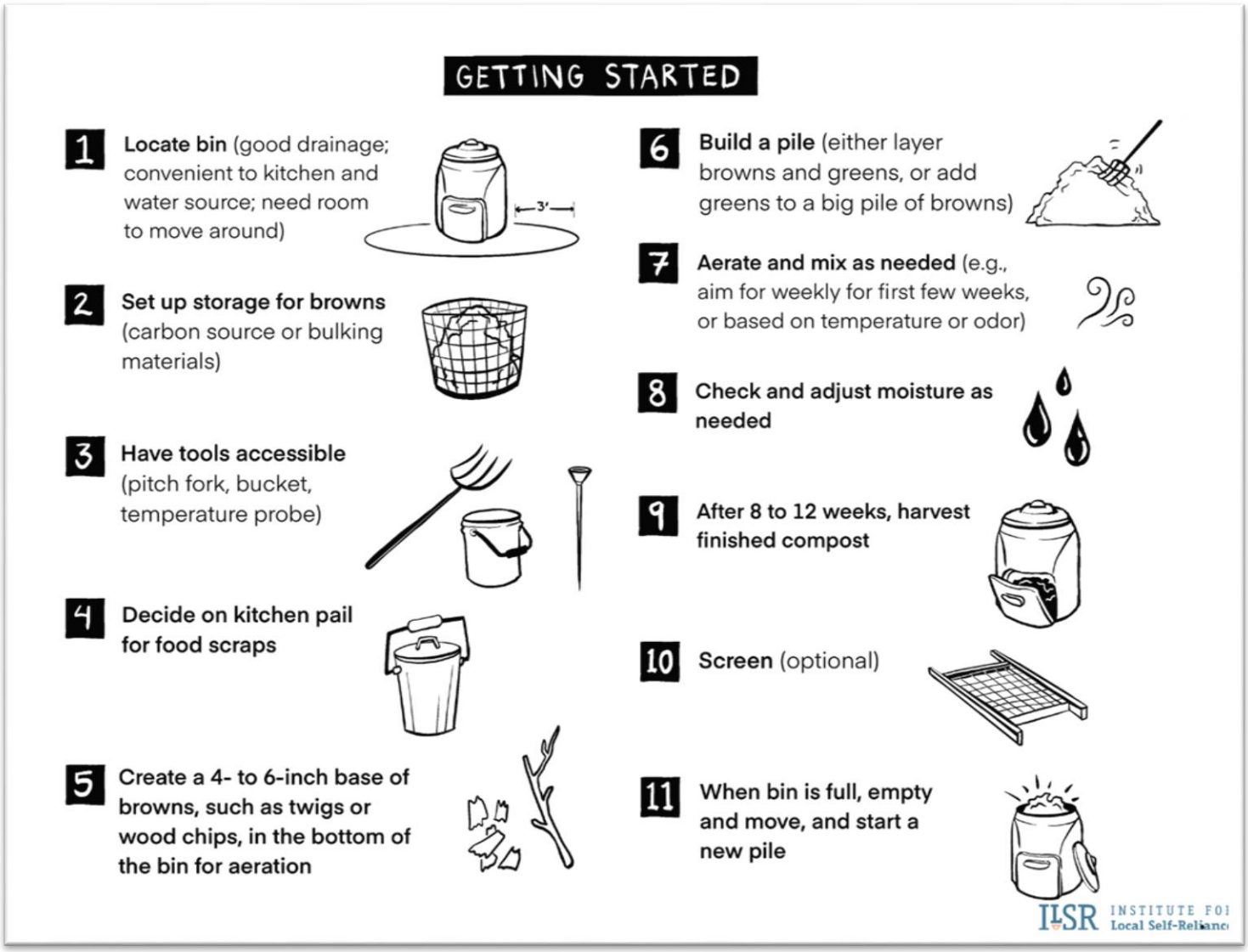
READY TO START DIVERTING YOUR FOOD SCRAPS FROM THE LANDFILL?

Here is how to start composting in your backyard.





Step 1: Find a spot in your yard and decide what type of composting method/container fits your lifestyle and budget.

Considerations for your spot:

- Your pile should be no smaller than 3x3x3 ft. It can be a free-standing pile or contained in some DIY method, enclosed or not.
- If you are worried about pests, you may consider a more enclosed option.
- For composting best practice, you will want to keep a pile of "browns" - high carbon sources like dried leaves, wood chips, shredded newspaper, etc. - near your pile to add, in order to keep the inputs into your pile balanced.
- You will need to stop adding to your pile for a period so that your pile has time to fully decompose to finished compost.
    - You may choose to have two or three piles so that you can have a system going to always have somewhere to put your food scraps (i.e. bin 1 on the left: add new food scraps here only, bin 2 in the center: food scraps are 3+ months and older – move them here and do not add/only turn over into itself, bin 3 on the right: food scraps are 6+ months and older – this is the bin from which you harvest finished compost)
    - Do you have enough room for this option?
- Composting should not be particularly smelly. A strong and bad odor coming from your compost lets you know something in the ecosystem is off, and can give you clues into troubleshooting what is off. You do not need a giant backyard to compost, and it will not fully ruin your backyard living experience.

Home Composter Options and Where to Buy

<u>Low to medium-cost options:</u>

- *Free standing pile*
- *Cinder block base and walls*
- *DIY Pallet walls (this is what we have here at GW V.E.G)*
- *Chicken-wire or wire mesh (pictured above)*
- *Plastic Geobins ($40)* (Available on Amazon)



<u>Higher-cost options:</u>

Tumblers

Some tumblers have two sections (A & B). Begin by adding composting materials to section A. Once A is full, you can stop adding to A, allowing the materials time to fully decompose. In the meantime, you can add scraps to section B. Once B is full you can likely harvest the finished compost from section A, stop putting compost in B, and begin the process again. The tumbler function allows for easy aeration of the compost, leading to more optimal conditions for aerobic decomposition. They are generally self-contained – deterring pests. They tend to be made of black plastic, which heats up well, aiding in decomposition.

Stationary Bins

Some of the stationary bin options are helpful because they have a slot that slides open at the bottom. This allows you to harvest finished compost from the bottom, while you can continue adding food scraps to the top. Please note that this would be considered “cold composting” as the pile is not being turned - still a great option for keeping food out of the landfill and creating compost, just slower and may not kill seeds or pathogens. Some home composters buy a spiral aerator to aerate their stationary bins. Some stationary bins are very cool because they look like Darth Vader. Alternatively, once the stationary bin is full, you can remove it and start a new pile.

- *Plastic Tumbler Composters and 80-gallon Stationary Bins ($100)* (Available at Lowes, Tractor Supply, Wayfair, Walmart)





Step 2: Begin collecting kitchen scraps (greens) and carbon-rich materials (browns) for your compost!



Kitchen Food Scrap Collection Containers

Collect food scraps in anything you want really! This is a container that you might choose to have on your countertop for ease of access that you temporarily collect food scraps in. It could also be a brown paper bag that you keep in the freezer or fridge (then the brown paper bag can get composted too). Collect food scraps in a bowl, a spare lidded pot on your countertop, an old yogurt container, etc. When this is full, once a week, or every couple of days – empty your kitchen container in your backyard compost area. Stainless steel countertop container $30, available at Target.

COMPOST 101

WHAT SHOULD I COMPOST?



YES!	(NO)
fruits (citrus okay, no stickers)	bread
vegetables	seafood
leaves	oil
coffee grounds/filters	cheese
tea bags (no staple)	meat
flowers	bones
sawdust	weeds
newspaper (no colored inks/magazines/etc)	diseased plants
eggshells	compostable utensils
paper bags	tissues
	paper towels
	leftovers

Step 3: Add to your compost pile!

- As soon as you have any kitchen scraps to compost, it is time to add to your pile!
- Most of your kitchen scraps will be considered “greens”

- It is helpful to add equal amounts of greens and browns by volume (not weight) to keep your compost critters doing the decomposition happy! So, when you add kitchen scraps, it is helpful to add an equal amount of browns at the same time. Many people will keep a supply of these materials next to their pile.
- Smaller pieces will decompose faster. I do not think that means chopping all of your kitchen scraps into teeny tiny pieces, but just something to keep in mind!

Step 4: Manage Compost Pile

- As you are adding to the pile, decomposition is already happening!
- I like to think of composting as stewarding an ecosystem. It is your job to keep everything balanced so optimal decomposition takes place.
- The compost pile should be wet, like a wrung-out sponge in order to create optimal conditions for decomposers.
- The microorganisms responsible for decomposition need oxygen! Start out by turning your compost pile every 1-2 weeks
- Decomposition will still happen without oxygen/turning Anaerobic bacteria will become more abundant. However, one of the byproducts of anaerobic decomposition is methane- a smelly and potent greenhouse gas.
- Without turning the compost, decomposition will happen much slower. This is usually referred to as “cold composting” Cold compost will likely not reach adequate temperatures to kill seeds and disease, but this keeps food out of the incinerator!
- You get to decide when to stop adding to a pile and create a new one! It is important to continue maintaining moisture and aeration as the first pile is decomposing!

Step 5: Finished Compost!!

- Once you stop adding to the pile, compost may be ready in 2-6 months depending on management practices, size of pile, and weather conditions.
- Finished compost will be dark brown, crumbly, and smell like the earth!
- At the GW garden we sift the compost, sorting out big sticks and rocks, and apply it as a soil amendment and mulch!

Resources:

DO THE ROT THING: Central Vermont Solid Waste Management District

Let it Rot! The Farmer's Guide to Composting" Stu Campbell

"The Science of Compost: Life, Death & Decay in the Garden", Dr. Julian Doberski

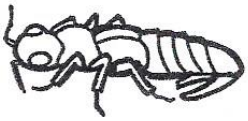
Institute for Local Self-Reliance

COMPOST CRITTERS WORKSHEET

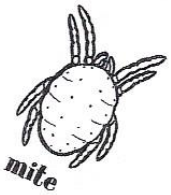
Circle Me If You Can Find Me



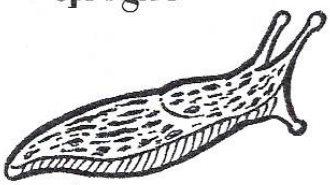
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springtail



mite



slug



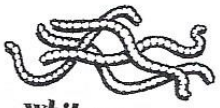
worm cocoon



sow bug



fruit fly



white worms



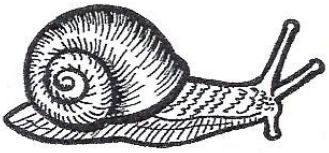
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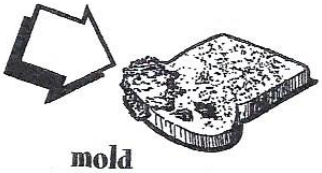
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spider



snail



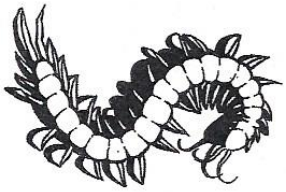
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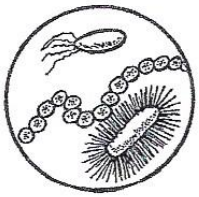
ant



millipede



centipede



bacteria



pill bug