



From Scraps to Soil

2026 Vermont Composting Short Course Syllabus

Offered by the University of Vermont Extension Community Horticulture Program with funding support from the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources Department of Environmental Conservation.



Extension
College of Agriculture and Life Sciences



Course Description

The Vermont Composting Short Course is a non-credit, certificate course that offers an in-depth study of backyard and community-scale composting. You will learn the science and practice of effectively turning food scraps and yard trimmings into compost for use in home, school, and community composting settings. Although the science covered in this course applies to a range of composting systems, this course is intended for small-scale, noncommercial compost systems and does not cover municipal waste systems, farm-scale compost operations, mortality, or humanure composting. By the end of this course, you will be able to:

- recognize the importance of composting as a waste reduction strategy;
- understand the basic steps involved in composting effectively, including how to manage composting without attracting wildlife; and
- effectively make and use compost for your home gardens and landscape and/or in community gardens.

Class Location and Meetings

This is a 6-week hybrid course that meets both online and in-person. The bulk of the class is offered online thanks to our national partner, the Extension Foundation campus. Here, you will access the course materials including pre-recorded lectures from soil and composting experts and agency staff; course readings; homework assignments; and online course discussions. We have built time into the course to practice navigating the online course environment to ensure all students feel comfortable before we dive into the content. The course also offers in-person workshop sessions at three Vermont locations. All students are highly encouraged to participate in at least one of the workshops to see composting in action, view different composting systems, and get your hands dirty!

Course Dates

The online course portal opens on Friday, September 11 and closes on November 22. Each of the six course modules opens weekly on Fridays at 5 p.m. ET. Students meet via Zoom on Thursday evenings from 6 to 7:30 p.m. ET from September 17 to October 22. In-person workshops are offered on Saturdays from 1 to 4 p.m. on October 3, 10 and 17.

- Sept 4: Registration closes.
- Sept 11: Course portal opens at 5 p.m. ET
- Sept 17: Zoom Class 1
- Sept 24: Zoom Class 2
- Oct 1: Zoom Class 3
- Oct 3: In-person workshop (site TBD)
- Oct 8: Zoom Class 4
- Oct 10: In-person workshop (site TBD)
- Oct 15: Zoom Class 5
- Oct 17: In-person workshop (site TBD)
- Oct 22: Zoom Class 6
- Oct 23: Final assignments due.
- Nov 22: Course portal closes.

Required Course Materials and Software

Required Course Materials

The course uses two required texts; both of which are included in the cost of the course and are available online as PDFs within the course portal:

- Vermont Master Composter Resource Manual
- NYC Master Composter Manual

Students will view pre-recorded class lectures available online, complete assigned readings, submit weekly questions, and take quizzes and a final exam to successfully complete the course and receive a certificate of completion. Students will also develop a project customized to their setting. All course modules also offer optional supplementary resources for further education on each topic addressed.

Required Platforms and Software

The course uses Moodle as the online platform available through the national Extension Foundation campus at: <http://campus.extension.org>. You will need to access the online course platform for assignments. To log in or create an account (if you have not yet taken a course at the Extension Foundation campus), visit: https://catalog.extension.org/account?action=login_form.

We use Zoom for our weekly live discussions with instructors. Please review Zoom's new user information if you have not previously used this platform: https://support.zoom.com/hc/en/getting-started?id=getting_started.

Instructors and Contact Information

The course is facilitated by Deb Heleba. She may be reached through the course platform or by email at debra.heleba@uvm.edu or by phone at 802.656.1777. Instructors for the course include. Natasha Duarte, director of the Composting Association of Vermont; soil scientist Dr. Wendy Sue Harper; Deb Heleba; and the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources Department of Environmental Conservation's Chris Belig. Bios for our instructors can be found on the course portal.

Refund Policy

The final date to drop out of the course and request a full refund is Friday, Sept. 25, 2026 by midnight. Refund requests must be made in writing (email to debra.heleba@uvm.edu). We are not able to provide course refunds after this date for any students.

Student Expectations

The Scraps to Soils is a 6-week commitment. To be successful, we expect students to commit the time it takes to watch the weekly lectures, do the weekly readings, and complete all assignments on time. We estimate that students devote about 4 hours per week to successfully complete the course. Since this is a certification course, it is graded. Course grades are heavily dependent on students' abilities to complete assignments on time. We know that you, as adult learners, lead busy lives and have accounted in our grading for a few missed assignments that may crop up during the course; however, repeated absences or skipped assignments will likely result in poor course performance which may lead to incompleteness of the course and its certificate. Therefore, you should plan on the following.

- Commit to completing all course assignments on time, including weekly readings, pre-recorded lectures, weekly quizzes (due Fridays by midnight), final exam, and pre- and post-course surveys.
- Submit weekly questions based on the lectures and reading assignments for the instructors by no later than midnight on Tuesdays.
- Attend weekly Zoom meetings on Thursdays, 6 to 7:30 p.m.
- Attend at least one in-person workshop on selected Saturdays, 1 to 4 p.m.

Behavior Expectations

By participating in the course, you agree to abide by the University of Vermont's Our Common Ground:

- Respect. We respect each other. We listen to each other, encourage each other and care about each other. We are strengthened by our diverse perspectives.
- Integrity. We value fairness, honest conduct, adherence to the facts, and sincerity.
- Innovation. We want to be at the forefront of change. We believe the best way to lead is to learn from our successes and mistakes.
- Openness. We encourage the open exchange of information and ideas.
- Justice. We unite against all forms of injustice, including racism. We challenge injustice toward any member of our community.
- Responsibility. We are responsible for our words and actions.

You may be asked to leave the course if your behavior: Poses a threat to the health or safety of participants or others; Threatens to disrupt the offering; May seriously diminish the experience of others; or for other sufficient reasons. Deb, the program coordinator, will engage with you if concerns arise about your behavior and provide an opportunity for you to correct it. Should concerns persist, the coordinator has complete discretion to ask you to leave or discontinue your participation in the program. There is no refund if you are dismissed.

Course Communication

Course communications occur in a couple of ways. We use discussion boards/forums for class reminders and for course discussions. Posts to these discussions boards automatically send emails to all students, so you should receive course notifications via email. For questions about the course, you can reach out to Deb anytime through direct messaging on the course site. To do so, click on the message block, and find and click on Deb's name and select "message" (this is a private, one-on-one communication). You may also email her at debra.heleba@uvm.edu. Note: If you do not wish to receive forum emails, you can unsubscribe by clicking "unsubscribe" at the bottom of the email. You can also set the emails to digest mode to receive just one email daily. If you unsubscribe, please be sure to check the discussion board/forum on the course site regularly to keep up to date.

Grading Criteria & Policies

This course uses a points system for grading. To receive a course completion certificate, you must receive at least 80 out of a total 100 points (80% or higher) for the course.

We completely understand that extenuating circumstances occur (life happens!) which is why we have constructed grading this way, allowing you to miss a few assignments (up to 20 points) should something happen during the course. Please carefully assess your ability to meet the requirements of the course and keep up with the weekly assignments; we cannot accept late submissions.

	Pre- and Post-Surveys	Weekly Questions (week 1 not graded)	Zoom Meeting Attendance (week 1 not graded)	4 Weekly Quizzes (no quiz week 1)	In-Person Workshop Attendance	Final Exam	Class Project	Total
Points per Item	5	4	3	5	8	15	12	
Total Points	10	20	15	20	8	15	12	100

Description of Assignments

Pre-Course & Post Course Surveys. All students are expected to complete a survey at the beginning of the course as well as a survey at the end (5 points per survey). The survey responses are confidential and results are used to improve the course. Completion of each survey will be used in calculating your grade.

Weekly Questions. To help solidify your learning, each week you will submit a weekly question or reflection based on that week's lecture and readings. The questions are submitted to the instructor who addresses them in our weekly Zoom meetings. Questions are due each week on Tuesdays by midnight. Submission of weekly questions count for 4 points each week (except for Week 1) and will be used in calculating your grade.

Zoom Meeting Attendance. All students participate in the real-time Zoom meetings on Thursdays from 6 to 7:30 p.m. ET to meet with instructors (3 points each week). The sessions are recorded and posted on the course portal for future viewing / reference by all students. To receive credit for attending, you must participate for at least 60 minutes of each Zoom meeting; otherwise you will be marked absent.

Quizzes. The course uses weekly quizzes (5 points each) as a quick knowledge check. They are open-book, multiple-choice questions. You can take each quiz twice with your highest score used in calculating your grade. There is no quiz on Weeks 1 and 6.

In-Person Sessions. To solidify your hands-on learning, you will participate in at least one of three in-person workshop sessions facilitated by Natasha Duarte (8 points). Students are encouraged but not required to attend more than one session to view different composting systems. The agenda is the same for all locations at sites. Each session is offered on Saturdays from 1 to 4 pm in locations, tentatively Ludlow, Montpelier, and Burlington (dates TBD).

Final Exam. There is a 15-question final exam conducted on Week 6. It is worth 15 points of your grade. The exam is open-book and multiple choice, and you may take it two times if necessary. Your highest score will be used in calculating your grade.

Class Project. Because students are highly encouraged to make changes to their compost systems (whether at home or at a community garden), students will develop a personalized composting system tailored to your own needs, values and learning goals. Each week, you will build onto the plan and turn in a completed plan at the end of the class. This assignment is worth 12 points and is scored on a credit/no credit scale (i.e., full credit if turned in by deadline; no credit for missing or late work).

Late Work. Please carefully review the list of weekly assignments with their deadlines. Plan to access the course site weekly and scan your email for reminders. Due to the volume of students enrolled in the course, late or missed assignments will not be accepted. This is a firm policy; we are not able to provide extra credit.

Recording Class Sessions and Photography

Zoom meetings will be audio-visually recorded for student reference and for students who are unable to attend the real-time sessions. Students who participate with their camera engaged or utilize a profile image are agreeing to have their video or image recorded. If you are unwilling to consent to have your profile or video image recorded, be sure to keep your camera off and do not use a profile image. Likewise, students who unmute during class and participate orally are agreeing to have their voices recorded. If you are not willing to consent to have your voice recorded during class, you will need to keep your mute button activated and communicate exclusively using the chat feature, which allows students to type questions and comments live.

Additionally, photographs are taken at in-person workshops for program education and marketing purposes. Students must notify the course coordinator if they do not agree to allow UVM to photograph them. Otherwise, it is assumed that students agree with UVM capturing images in which they are visibly recognizable or identified and waive all rights that they may have to any claims for payment or royalties in connection with their participation in the course.

Intellectual Property Statement/Prohibition on Sharing Academic Materials

Students are prohibited from publicly sharing or selling academic materials that they did not author (for example: class syllabus, outlines, class presentations authored by the instructor, copyrighted materials, etc.); and students are prohibited from sharing assessments (for example, homework, quizzes, and final exam). Violations will be handled under UVM's Intellectual Property policy and Code of Academic Integrity.

Student Learning Accommodations

In keeping with University policy, any student with a documented disability interested in utilizing ADA accommodations should contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS), the office of Disability Services on campus for students. SAS works with students and faculty in an interactive process to explore reasonable and appropriate accommodations, which are communicated to faculty in an accommodation letter. All students are strongly recommended to discuss with their faculty the accommodations they plan to use in each course. Faculty who receive Letters of Accommodation with Disability Related Flexible accommodations that go beyond the default accommodations will need to fill out the Disability Related Flexibility Agreement. Any questions from faculty or students on the agreement should be directed to the SAS specialist who is indicated on the letter. Contact SAS: A170 Living/Learning Center; 802-656-7753; access@uvm.edu; www.uvm.edu/access.

FERPA Rights Disclosure

The purpose of UVM's FERPA Rights Disclosure is to communicate the rights of students regarding access to, and privacy of their student educational records as provided for in the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) of 1974.

Religious Holidays

Students have the right to practice the religion of their choice. If you need to miss class to observe a religious holiday, please submit the dates of your absence to Deb in writing by the end of the second full week of classes. You will be permitted to make up work within a mutually agreed-upon time.

Pacing Guide

The pacing guide outlines assignment and due dates week-by-week to help you with scheduling your time.

Wk	Dates	Topic	Zoom Mtg	Assignments	Assignments Due
1	9/11 – 9/18	Welcome.	9/17	Complete pre-course survey. Watch Deb's welcome video. Post introduction post on course discussion forum. Post a question based on your learning for class discussion. Work on Week 1 compost project questions.	9/11: Module opens at 5 pm. 9/15: Post introduction post by 11:59 pm. 9/15: Submit your weekly question/comment by 11:59 pm. 9/17: Attend Zoom, 6 to 7:30 pm. 9/18: Complete pre-course survey by 11:59 p.m.
2	9/18 – 9/25	Introduction to Composting and Decomposition Science	9/24	Watch Introduction to Composting lecture. Watch Dr. Harper's Home Compost System video. In the VT Master Composter Manual, please read: • Chapter 2: What is Composting? • Chapter 3: Benefits of Composting • Chapter 4: The Biology of Composting • Chapter 5: Factors in the Composting Process • Chapter 6: Compost Pile Ingredients • Chapter 7: Building and Layering Your Pile • Chapter 8: Compost bins • Chapter 9: Troubleshooting Compost Piles In the NYC Master Composter Manual, read: • Chapter 2: Composting, pages 2-1 to 2-24. • Chapter 3: Compost Systems and Tools, pages 3-1 to 3-30. Post a question based on your learning for class discussion. Work on Week 2 compost project questions.	9/18: Module opens at 5 pm. 9/22: Submit your weekly question/comment by 11:59 pm. 9/24: Attend Zoom, 6 to 7:30 pm. 9/25: Weekly quiz due by 11:59 pm. 9/25: Sign up for In-Person Workshop by 11:59 pm.

Wk	Dates	Topic	Zoom Mtg	Assignments	Assignments Due
3	9/25 – 10/2	Soil Ecology	10/1	Watch Soil Ecology lecture. In the VT Master Composter Manual, review: Chapter 4: The Biology of Compost In the NYC Master Composter Manual, read: Chapter 1: Soil & Decomposition Science Post a question based on your learning for class discussion. Work on Weeks 3-4 compost project questions.	9/25: Module opens at 5 pm. 9/29: Submit your weekly question/comment by 11:59 pm. 10/1: Attend Zoom, 6 to 7:30 pm. 10/2: Weekly quiz due by 11:59 pm.
4	10/2 – 10/9	Community Composting	10/8	Watch Community Composting lecture. In the NYC Master Composter Manual, read: Chapter 4: Site Design & Management Post a question based on your learning for class discussion. Work on Weeks 3-4 compost project questions.	10/2: Module opens at 5 pm. 10/6: Submit your weekly question/comment by 11:59 pm. 10/8: Attend Zoom, 6 to 7:30 pm. 10/9: Weekly quiz due by 11:59 pm.
5	10/9 – 10/16	Using Compost	10/15	Watch Using Compost lecture. In the VT Master Composter Manual, read: - Chapter 10: Compost Use - Chapter 11: Compost Tea - Chapter 12: Worm Composting In the NYC Master Composter Manual, read: - Chapter 5: Using Compost, Mulch and Cover Crops Read “Composting with Worms” bulletin. Post a question based on your learning for class discussion. Work on Week 5 compost project questions.	10/9: Module opens at 5 pm. 10/13: Submit your weekly question/comment by 11:59 pm. 10/15: Attend Zoom, 6 to 7:30 pm. 10/16: Weekly quiz due by 11:59 pm.
6	10/16 – 10/23	Compost Policies. Wrap up.	10/22	Watch Vermont Compost Policy lecture. Review Vermont’s Universal Recycling Law and Act 148: Universal Recycling Law websites. Watch Managing Food Waste video. Post a question/reflection based on your learning for class discussion. Finalize compost project and prepare to share with class.	10/16: Module opens at 5 pm. 10/20: Submit your weekly question/comment by 11:59 pm. 10/22: Attend Zoom, 6 to 7:30 pm. 10/23: Post-course survey due by 11:59 pm. 10/23: Final exam due by 11:59 pm. 10/23: Course project due by 11:59 p.m.

