



Welcome to the

## 2022 Vermont Master Composter Course

*Offered by the University of Vermont Extension Master Gardener Program in collaboration with the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources*

### Course Syllabus

#### Course Description

The Vermont Master Composter course offers an in-depth study of backyard composting. Participants interested in home, school and community composting who take this course will learn about the different ways to turn food scraps and yard trimmings into compost for healthier, nutrient rich soil.

The course is offered online at [campus.extension.org](https://campus.extension.org) where participants work through eight course modules that contain course materials, pre-recorded lectures, and homework assignments. They participate in ongoing course discussions and attend weekly live Q&A sessions with course instructors.

We offer two tracks:

- 1) Our volunteer track (Track 1) where, in addition to the standard course content, participants also attend an in-person visit to one of our approved Vermont Master Composter project sites and participate in an extra session to learn about becoming a Vermont Master Composter volunteer.
- 2) Our learn-at-your-own-pace track (Track 2) is offered to Vermonters who are not interested in a volunteer commitment and for participants outside of Vermont.

#### Meeting Times & Location

The online course portal opens on September 2 and closes on December 2, 2022. Each of the eight course modules opens weekly on Fridays at 5 p.m. ET.

We have live Zoom meetings every Thursday at 6 to 7 p.m. ET from September 8 to October 27, 2022. You will receive the Zoom link for our weekly course meetings when the course opens.

#### Instructors and Contact Information

The course is facilitated by Deb Heleba, Extension Master Gardener Program Coordinator. She may be reached through the course platform or by email at [debra.heleba@uvm.edu](mailto:debra.heleba@uvm.edu) or phone at 802.656.1777. Program staff members [Lisa Chouinard](#) and [Cindy Heath](#) provide support for the course and to Vermont Master Composter volunteers. You can learn more about the staff and how we can support you at: [www.uvm.edu/extension/mastergardener/contact-us](https://www.uvm.edu/extension/mastergardener/contact-us).

Instructors for the course include:

**Natasha Duarte** is the Director of the Composting Association of Vermont (CAV). CAV's mission is to advance the production and use of compost to support soil health through practices that contribute to water quality, plant vigor, and environmental resilience. Previously, Natasha served as the Director of the International Society of Ethnobiology, a non-profit dedicated to preserving the vital links between human societies and the natural world. She also worked as Research Soil Scientist for the USDA Forest Service. Natasha earned a Master of Science degree in Soil Science from the North Carolina State University.

**Wendy Sue Harper.** Dr. Wendy Sue Harper is a soil scientist who has taught ecological agriculture, soil science, and composting for 30 years. She is an associate faculty member at Prescott College in the Food Systems Sustainability Master of Science program and teaches a Conserving Vermont's Forest Soils course at Hogback Community College. She also inspects crop farms and processors for organic certification with the Vermont Organic Farmers. Dr. Harper earned a Master of Science degree in Forest Resources from the Pennsylvania State University and a Ph.D. from the Department of Plant and Soil Science at the University of Vermont.

**Emma Stuhl** is an Environmental Analyst at the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources Department of Environmental Conservation where she works for the Solid Waste Management Program that helps Vermonters waste less, compost more, recycle better, and use and manage materials more sustainably. Emma earned a Master of Science degree from the University of Vermont's Field Naturalist Program.

## Course Learning Objectives

After completing this course, all students will be able to:

- Use UVM Extension, Master Gardener/Composter, the Extension Foundation's Campus, Zoom and other online resources for learning;
- Articulate the benefits of composting;
- Apply the principals of composting to create and manage an active compost system;
- Articulate the goals of Vermont's Act 148;
- Understand the basic properties of soil and the decomposition process; and
- Understand compost site design and managing a community compost site.

In addition, Track 1 (volunteer track) students will:

- Be able to perform research on compost questions using University and other sources of research-based information to diagnose compost problems and provide management recommendations;
- Know the steps to create compost-related learning environments in local communities with other Vermont Master Composter and/or Extension Master Gardener volunteers; and
- Be able to articulate the mission of the UVM Extension Master Gardener/Composter Program, including the roles and responsibilities of Master Composter volunteers and program staff.

## Required Course Materials

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

- The Vermont Master Composter Resource Manual
- NYC Master Composter Manual

Reviewing pre-recorded class lectures and other assigned readings are also required to successfully complete the course. In addition, all course modules offered 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 Extension Foundation campus at: <http://campus.extension.org>. If you have not yet taken a course at the Extension Foundation campus, you will need to create an account at: <https://catalog.extension.org/account?action=createaccount>. We use Zoom for our weekly live course discussions. Please review [Zoom's new user information](#) if you have not previously used this platform.

## Course Outline / Weekly Schedule

This is a hybrid online course requiring both asynchronous (on your own) work and live weekly Zoom course discussions for Track 1 (volunteer track) participants. Over the course of the eight weeks, here's what you can expect.

Each new module opens on Fridays at 5:00 pm ET, starting on September 2. Interaction among participants, instructors and staff are centered on forums organized within the course platform.

Each week, Track 1 students are required to do the following.

1. Watch a pre-recorded lecture between Friday night and Wednesday night.
2. Do the reading between Friday night and Wednesday night.
3. Post one question you have for the instructor about the lecture and/or reading by no later than Tuesday at 11:59 pm.
4. \*Attend the live course discussion session on Zoom each Thursday night from 6 to 7 pm ET. (\*Only Track 1 students attend the live course discussions; Track 2 students have access to the recordings).
5. Complete the weekly 5-question quiz no later than Friday at 11:59 pm ET.

Track 2 (at your own pace) students navigate the course at their own speed and just need to finish the course (including quizzes and surveys) by December 2. Track 2 students do not participate in the live weekly Zoom course discussions but do interact with instructors and fellow students within the online course platform through discussion forums and do have access to all recorded sessions.

The schedule for the 2022 schedule is as follows. Modules covered during weeks 6 and 7 are subject to change based on instructor availability – advanced notice will be given if changes occur.

### Week 1: Course Introduction. September 2-9

We'll start the course by getting to know one another through virtual introductions. Deb Heleba will provide an introduction and answer any logistical questions you may have. This week, you will take time to familiarize yourself with the navigation features of the course, learn how to ask questions, and locate where to read and post announcements.

### Assignments

- Please review the course syllabus and make sure you can access the Vermont Master Composter Resource Manual and NYC Master Composter Manual.
- Track 1 (volunteer track) students should complete program volunteer requirements (volunteer application, background check form, and Minor Protection Training).
- Post an introduction of yourself to the class in the Student Introduction Forum.

### Dates & Deadlines

- Sept 2: Module opens at 5 pm.
- Sept 6: Post your introduction and submit question by 11:59 pm.
- Sept 6: Track 1 (volunteer track) sign up for in-person site visit location/date.
- Sept 8: Zoom course discussion at 6 pm.
- Sept 9: Complete pre-course survey by 11:59 pm.
- Sept 9: Track 1 (volunteer track) student complete program volunteer requirements by 11:59 pm.

## **Week 2: Introduction to Composting. September 9-16**

This week you will learn about the history and environmental benefits of composting from Dr. Wendy Sue Harper. You will also learn about the five main factors most important in the composting process and will review various compost systems. Composting tools and how to troubleshoot issues will also be covered.

### **Assignments**

- Watch Introduction to Composting lecture.
- In the Vermont Master Composter Resource Manual, read:
  - Chapter 2: What is Composting?
  - Chapter 3: Benefits of Backyard Composting
  - Chapter 4: History of Compost
  - Chapter 7: Compost Pile Ingredients
  - Chapter 8: Building and Layering Your Pile
  - Chapter 9: Compost bins
  - Chapter 10: Troubleshooting Compost Piles
- In the NYC Master Composter Manual, read:
  - Chapter 2: Composting
  - Chapter 3: Compost Systems and Tools
- Post a question based on your learning for class discussion.

### **Dates & Deadlines**

- Sept 9: Module opens at 5 pm.
- Sept 13: Submit question by 11:59 pm.
- Sept 15: Zoom course discussion at 6 pm.
- Sept 16: Complete this week's quiz by 11:59 pm.

## **Week 3: Soil Ecology. September 16-23.**

Dr. Wendy Sue Harper will teach you about the properties of soil and how decomposition works. She will also cover the ecology and biology of soils and decomposition, and the effects of compost on soil fertility.

### **Assignments**

- Watch Soil Ecology lecture.
- In the Vermont Master Composter Resource Manual, read:
  - Chapter 5: 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.

### **Dates & Deadlines**

- Sept 16: Module opens at 5 pm.
- Sept 20: Submit question by 11:59 pm.
- Sept 22: Zoom course discussion at 6 pm.
- Sept 23: Complete this week's quiz by 11:59 pm.

## **Week 4: Community Composting, September 23-30**

This week, Natasha Duarte will cover the various scales of compost operations (home, community, drop-off). You will also learn about the systems for managing different types of community sites. Lastly, this module covers starting a community compost site, site design, harvesting, screening, and managing a community composting project.

### **Assignments**

- 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.

### **Dates & Deadlines**

- Sept 23: Module opens at 5 pm.
- Sept 27: Submit question by 11:59 pm.
- Sept 29: Zoom course discussion at 6 pm.
- Sept 30: Complete this week's quiz by 11:59 pm.

**Note: Track 1 (volunteer track) students:** The required in-person site visits / training at community compost sites are scheduled on:

- Sept 24 for Ludlow location
- Oct 1 for St. Albans location

## **Week 5: Using Compost, September 30-October 7**

This week, Natasha Duarte dives deeper into the benefits of composting and rebuilding the soil. She discusses the practical application of the various types of compost (tea, vermicomposting, mulch, etc.) while providing perspective on why these processes are important to the health of the environment.

### **Assignments**

- Watch Using Compost lecture.
- In the Vermont Master Composter Resource Manual, read:
  - Chapter 11: Compost Use
  - Chapter 12: The Benefits of Compost Use
  - Chapter 13: Compost Tea
  - Chapter 14: Vermicomposting, Worm Composting
  - Chapter 15: Ecological Landscape Maintenance and Design Approaches
- 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.

### **Dates & Deadlines**

- Sept 30: Module opens at 5 pm.
- Oct 4: Submit question by 11:59 pm.
- Oct 6: Zoom course discussion at 6 pm.
- Oct 7: Complete this week's quiz by 11:59 pm.

## **Week 6: Vermont Compost Policy, October 7-14**

This week you will hear from Emma Stuhl about the importance of diverting organics as it relates to local, state, and national laws and policies, and the science underlying those policies. Emphasis will be on Act 148, Vermont's Universal Recycling Law, as well as the Food Recovery Hierarchy.

### **Assignments**

- Watch Vermont Compost Policy lecture.
- Review Vermont's Universal Recycling Law and Act 148: Universal Recycling Law websites.
- Watch Managing Food Waste video.

### **Dates & Deadlines**

- Oct 7: Module opens at 5 pm.
- Oct 11: Submit question by 11:59 pm.
- Oct 13: Zoom course discussion at 6 pm.
- Oct 14: Complete this week's quiz by 11:59 pm.

## **\*Week 7: Reaching & Teaching Vermonters, October 14-21 -- Available to Track 1 students only.**

During this week, Track 1 students will learn more about the structure and benefits of the Vermont Master Composter volunteer program by Deb Heleba and Cindy Heath. You will learn about the volunteer internship requirements and the criteria for ongoing projects. Also covered will be lesson planning, communication, and how to answer questions from the public.

### **Assignments**

- Watch Volunteering lecture.
- In the Vermont Master Composter Resource Manual, read:
  - Chapter 17: Guidelines for Effective Communication
  - Chapter 18: Potential Questions from the Public
- In the NYC Master Composter Manual, read:
  - Chapter 6: Reaching and Teaching Others
- Post a question based on your learning for class discussion.

### **Dates & Deadlines**

- Oct 14: Module opens at 5 pm.
- Oct 18: Submit question by 11:59 pm.
- Oct 20: Zoom course discussion at 6 pm.
- Oct 21: Complete this week's quiz by 11:59 pm.

## **Week 8: Final Assignments, October 21-28**

During the final week of the class, you will complete a final exam and post-course survey.

### **Assignments**

- Complete final exam.
- Complete post-course survey.
- Reading: Please read all materials provided on the website in this section.

### **Deadlines**

- Oct 27: Deb will be on Zoom from 6-7 pm for office hours if you have questions.
- Oct 28: Complete final exam and post-course survey by 11:59 pm.

## **Course closes, December 2**

## Attendance Policy and Volunteer Track Participant Expectations

If you are a Track 1 (volunteer track) student, attendance is required for all live course discussion sessions on Thursday evenings. The goal of these sessions is to interact with the instructors and other students. If you miss a session due to an unforeseen circumstance or emergency, they will be recorded and posted on the website (However, we cannot guarantee recording due to tech issues that may occur with Zoom; therefore, it is highly recommended to attend the live sessions). Students should notify Deb if you miss a session and should plan to miss no more than 1 session during the course.

Track 1 students are required to:

- Watch the pre-recorded lecture between Friday night and Wednesday night each week,
- Do the required reading between Friday night and Wednesday night each week.
- Post a question you have for the instructor about the lecture and/or reading by no later than Tuesday at 11:59 pm.
- Attend the online course discussion session on Zoom each Thursday night from 6 to 7 pm ET.
- Complete the course surveys, quizzes and final exam.

### Track 1 (volunteer track) Student Expectations

Track 1 students must complete a 10-hour volunteer internship during the 2 years after taking the course. The purpose of the 10-hour internship is to get hands-on experience after the course working under the mentorship of Master Composter volunteers. All volunteer hours to become a Certified Master Composter must be done at approved projects or implementing an approved volunteer activity.

Throughout the course, Track 1 students should carefully assess their capacity to complete the 10-hour hands-on internship in order to become a Certified Master Composter volunteer. Vermont Master Composter volunteers are considered representatives of the University of Vermont and share research-based composting knowledge with the public through the Extension Master Gardener Helpline, talks and displays at fairs, farmers' markets and other outlets, and/or assist with UVM Extension Master Gardener or Composter approved community projects.

**Track 2 (self-paced) students.** If you prefer learning at your own pace and would like to have access to the course materials and earn a "Home Composting" certificate, then you may choose this option. This means you will have access to the website, reading, lectures, quizzes, and other materials during the course. You will need to complete all quizzes by December 2 and, if they are complete, you will receive a certificate of completion called the "Home Composter" Certificate.

**Switching Tracks:** Should you find that you are no longer able to commit to the volunteer requirements of Track 1, please notify Deb as soon as possible so that we can switch you to the self-paced (Track 2) on the course website and in our database. If you switch to Track 2 you will be able to receive recognition of course completion via the Home Composter Certificate upon completion of all assignments by Dec 2.

### Refund Policy

The final date to drop out of the course and request a refund is Friday, September 9. We are not able to provide course refunds after this date for any students (Track 1 or Track 2). However, if unforeseen circumstances arise that mean you will not be able to complete the course, you may provide a written request to Deb to defer your participation to the following year's course.

## Grading Criteria / Policies

**Quizzes.** These are open-book, multiple choice questions. You can take the quizzes 2 times. Your highest grade will count. All students must receive at least 4 out of 5 points on each of the quizzes (80%).

**Final Exam.** There is a 10-question final exam at the end of the course. The exam is open-book and multiple choice, and you may take it two times if necessary. All students must receive at least 7 out of 10 points on the final exam, (70%).

**Pre-Course & Post Course Surveys.** All students are expected to complete a survey at the beginning of the course as well as a survey again at the end. The surveys will be confidential and will be used to improve the course. Please note that the surveys must be completed in order to successfully complete the course.

**Weekly Course Discussion Sessions.** Live sessions are required for Track 1 (volunteer track) students only. Track 2 students may watch the recordings. Attendance is taken for Track 1 students. Track 1 students should plan to attend Zoom – ideally with cameras on – and plan to interact with students and instructors. This is designed as a small group activity to encourage interaction.

Track 2 students may view the recordings of the weekly course discussion sessions.

**In-Person Sessions.** Track 1 students are required to participate in one of two in-person sessions facilitated by Natasha Duarte. The content will be the same at both locations/dates offered from 1 to 3 pm. Track 1 students will choose to attend either:

- Sept 24 for Ludlow location or
- Oct 1 for St. Albans location.

If you cannot attend due to an extenuating emergency or medical circumstance, please notify Deb ASAP.

The in-person sessions are not available to Track 2 students.

## Recording Class Sessions

Our class discussion sessions will be audio-visually recorded for students in the class to refer back to, and for students who are unable to attend live. 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.

## 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 or class presentations authored by the instructor, copyrighted materials, etc.); and students are prohibited from sharing assessments (for example homework or a take-home examination). 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 Deb in an accommodation letter. All students are strongly recommended to discuss with Deb the accommodations they plan to use in each course. Upon receiving Letters of Accommodation with Disability Related Flexible accommodations, Deb will complete the Disability Related Flexibility Agreement. Any questions about the agreement should be directed to the SAS specialist who is indicated on the letter.

Please contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) at:

A170 Living/Learning Center

802-656-7753

[access@uvm.edu](mailto:access@uvm.edu)

[www.uvm.edu/access](http://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.