



Welcome to the

2024 Vermont Master Composter Course

A noncredit Extension course offered by the University of Vermont Extension Community Horticulture 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. Students 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. The course is offered online at campus.extension.org where students work weekly through eight modules that contain course materials, pre-recorded lectures, homework assignments, and online course discussions.

Students participate in the course in one of two tracks offered:

Track 1 is our volunteer certification track, meant for students who'd like to become certified Vermont Master Composter volunteers who give back to their communities with composting education and support. In this Track, students complete volunteer requirements, participate in weekly real-time Zoom sessions with instructors, learn about becoming a Vermont Master Composter volunteer, and participate in an in-person workshop(s) to see composting systems in action. Successful graduates of Track 1 receive a Vermont Backyard Composter certificate of course completion and, upon the completion of a ten-hour volunteer service commitment, earn a Vermont Master Composter certificate and title.

Track 2 is our learn-at-your-own-pace track offered to Vermonters who are not interested in or available to participate in a volunteer commitment. This track is also available to participants who live outside Vermont. Students have access to all course content (including recordings of lectures and discussion sessions) and are able to navigate the course at their leisure. Successful graduates of Track 2 receive a Vermont Backyard Composter certificate of course completion.

Meeting Times & Location

The online course portal opens on Friday, August 30, 2024 and closes on November 8, 2024. Each of the eight course modules opens weekly on Fridays at 5 p.m. ET. Track 1 (volunteer certification track) students meet via Zoom on Thursday evenings from 6 to 7:30 p.m. ET from September 5 to October 24, 2024. Track 1 students will receive the Zoom link for our weekly course meetings when the course opens.

Important Dates

Aug. 23: Registration ends by midnight.

Aug. 30: Course opens at 5 p.m.

Sept. 5, 12, 19, 26, & Oct. 3, 10, 17, 24: Live Q&A Zoom sessions with Instructors for Track 1 students only.

Sept. 13: Final date to drop the course and request a refund.

Sept 21, 28 & Oct 5, 12: Tentative Dates for in-person workshops for Track 1 students only.

Oct. 25: Final assignments due by midnight. No exceptions.

Nov 15: Course access ends.

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:

- The 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. 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>. 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.

Zoom for Track 1 Students: We use Zoom for our weekly live discussions with instructors for Track 1 students only. Please review [Zoom's new user information](#) if you have not previously used this platform.

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 principles 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 manage a compost site.

In addition, Track 1 (volunteer certification 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.

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 2024 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 Emma Stuhl. 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 refund is Friday, Sept. 13, 2024 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 (Track 1 or Track 2). However, Track 1 students may switch over to Track 2

upon written request to Deb to complete the course at your own pace and receive a certificate of course completion.

Student Expectations

The Vermont Master Composter course is an 8-week commitment. To be successful, we expect students to commit the time it takes to watch the weekly lectures, do the weekly readings, take the weekly quizzes, and complete all assignments on time. We estimate that Track 1 students devote about 4 hours per week to successfully complete the course and Track 2 students may spend 2 to 4 hours each week to watch recorded sessions and complete the quizzes and final.

Expectations of Track 1 (Volunteer Certification) Students:

Course grades are heavily dependent on our students' abilities to complete assignments on time. We know that our students 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 and an inability to proceed with program participation. Therefore, Track 1 students should:

- 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 sessions on Thursdays, 6 to 7:30 p.m.
- Attend at least one in-person workshop on selected Saturdays, 1 to 3 p.m.

In addition, Track 1 students must:

- Complete volunteerism paperwork during the first week of the course: Volunteer Application, a background check consent form (if you have lived in Vermont for more than a year) or fingerprinting process (if you have lived in Vermont for less than a year); and our Minor Protection Training. Failure to complete the volunteerism paperwork on time jeopardizes your Track 1 status and you will be asked to move to Track 2 to complete the course.
- Upon successfully completing the course, Track 1 students participate in a 10-hour volunteer internship (over 2 years). The purpose of the internship is to gain volunteer experience after the course by working under the mentorship of Master Composter volunteers. All volunteer hours to become a Certified Master Composter must be conducted at approved projects or on approved volunteer activities. Track 1 students should carefully assess their capacity to complete the 10-hour internship to become a Certified Master Composter volunteer. Vermont Master Composter volunteers are considered representatives of the University of Vermont and share research-based composting information with Vermonters through public presentations; tabling and displays at fairs, farmers' markets and other outlets; and/or assisting with Master Composter-approved community projects.

Expectations of Track 2 (At-Your-Own-Pace) Students:

- If interested in a Backyard Composter Certificate, Track 2 students must complete the pre- and post-course surveys, course quizzes, and final exam before the course closes. Track 2 students have access to all course materials on the site, including lectures, recordings of weekly Q&A sessions, reading assignments, and other resources. If you complete all quizzes and the final exam by November 16, you will receive a Backyard Composters certificate of course completion.

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 reason.

The program coordinator will seek to 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.

Upon successful completion of the course, Track 1 students are added to our Vermont Master Composter volunteer listserv and newsletter list to receive notifications about volunteer opportunities and other program news. Your email is also shared with volunteer leaders so they can introduce you to other volunteers and project opportunities. You may choose to opt-out of these communications upon request.

Grading Criteria & Policies

This course uses a points system for grading. Track 1 students must receive at least 102 out of a total 120 points (85% or higher) to pass the course and Track students must receive at least 44 out of a total 55 points (80% or higher) to pass.

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 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.

Track 1 (volunteer certification). To pass the course, Track 1 students must receive a score of 85% or higher for the course. That means you must achieve at least 102 out of a total 120 points as follows.

	Pre- and Post-Surveys	Weekly Discussion Questions	Attendance at Weekly Zoom Meetings	Weekly Quizzes	In-Person Workshop	Final Exam	Total
Points per Item	5	4 (2 pts for wk 1)	3	5 (no quiz for wk 1)	10	20	
Total Points	10	26	24	30	10	20	120

Track 2 students. To pass the course, Track 2 students must achieve a score of 80% or higher to pass the course. That means you must receive at least 44 out of a total of 55 points by the close of the course on midnight on November 16 as follows.

	Pre- and Post-Surveys	Weekly Quizzes	Final Exam	Total
Points per Item	5	5 (wks 2-6)	20	
Total Points	10	25	20	55

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.

Quizzes. The course uses weekly quizzes (5 points each); they are open-book, multiple-choice questions. You can take each quiz twice with your highest score used in calculating your grade.

Final Exam. There is a 20-question final exam at the end of the course worth 20 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.

Weekly Instructor Questions. To help solidify your learning each week, we require that Track 1 students submit a weekly question based on the lecture and readings. Selected 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 (2 points for Week 1) and will be used in calculating your grade. Although completely optional, Track 2 may submit weekly questions by midnight on Tuesdays too.

Weekly Zoom Meetings. Track 1 students are required to attend 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; recordings may be accessed by all students. If students do not participate in at least 60 minutes of Zoom meetings, they will be marked absent. Track 2 students do not attend the real-time meetings but may view the recordings.

In-Person Sessions. Track 1 students are required to participate in at least one of three in-person workshop sessions facilitated by Natasha Duarte. Students are encouraged but not required to attend more than one session to view different composting systems. Track 2 students will be invited to attend these sessions only if space is available. The agenda is the same for all locations at sites in Ludlow, Montpelier and St. Albans. Each session is offered on Saturdays from 1 to 3 pm – final dates/locations will be posted to the course portal. If you cannot attend due to an extenuating emergency or medical circumstance, please notify Deb ASAP.

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, please do not ask for late or extra credit.

Volunteer Requirements. In addition to the above, Track 1 students must also complete our program's volunteer requirements (volunteer application, background check consent form or fingerprinting, and minor protection training) by the deadline to continue as a Track 1 (volunteer certification) student. Missing these assignments means you cannot continue as a Track 1 student and will be moved to Track 2.

Recording Class Sessions and Photography

Our Track 1 class discussion sessions will be audio-visually recorded for student reference 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.

Additionally, Track 1 students are required to attend in-person workshops where photographs are taken 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 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: access@uvm.edu or 802-656-7753 A170 Living/Learning Center, 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.

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 certification) students. 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 August 30. Interaction among students is encouraged and occurs 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 Tuesday night.
2. Do the reading between Friday night and Tuesday night.
3. Post your weekly question 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 7:30 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 each Friday at 11:59 pm ET.

Track 2 (at your own pace) students navigate the course at their own speed and complete the course (including quizzes and surveys) by November 16. Track 2 students do not participate in the live weekly Zoom course discussions but do interact with fellow students within the online course platform through discussion forums and do have access to all recorded sessions.

2024 Weekly Schedule

The schedule for the 2024 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. August 30-September 6, 2024

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 about the course and volunteering for the program. 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. Track 1 students will complete program volunteerism requirements.

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 certification) students should complete program volunteer requirements (volunteer application, background check consent form, and Minor Protection Training).
- Post an introduction of yourself to the class in the Student Introduction Forum.
- Post a question to practice this function and ask about the course.

Dates & Deadlines

- Aug 30: Module opens at 5 pm.
- Sept 3: Post your introduction and submit a question or comment by 11:59 pm.
- Sept 3: Track 1 (volunteer track): Sign up for in-person site visit location/date.
- Sept 5: Track 1: Zoom course discussion at 6 pm.
- Sept 6: All students: Complete pre-course survey by 11:59 pm.
- Sept 6: Track 1 (volunteer track): Complete program volunteer requirements by 11:59 pm.

Week 2: Introduction to Composting. September 6-13

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.
- Watch Dr. Harper's Home Compost System video.
- 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 6: Module opens at 5 pm.
- Sept 10: Submit question/comment by 11:59 pm.
- Sept 12: Zoom course discussion at 6 pm.
- Sept 13: Complete this week's quiz by 11:59 pm.

Week 3: Soil Ecology. September 13-19

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 13: Module opens at 5 pm.
- Sept 17: Submit question/comment by 11:59 pm.
- Sept 19: Zoom course discussion at 6 pm.
- Sept 20: Complete this week's quiz by 11:59 pm.

Week 4: Community Composting, September 20-26

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 20: Module opens at 5 pm.
- Sept 24: Submit question/comment by 11:59 pm.
- Sept 26: Zoom course discussion at 6 pm.
- Sept 27: Complete this week's quiz by 11:59 pm.

Week 5: Using Compost, September 27-October 4

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 27: Module opens at 5 pm.
- Oct 1: Submit question/comment by 11:59 pm.
- Oct 3: Zoom course discussion at 6 pm.
- Oct 4: Complete this week's quiz by 11:59 pm.

Week 6: Vermont Compost Policy, October 4-11

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.
- Post a question based on your learning for class discussion.

Dates & Deadlines

- Oct 4: Module opens at 5 pm.
- Oct 8: Submit question/comment by 11:59 pm.
- Oct 10: Zoom course discussion at 6 pm.
- Oct 11: Complete this week's quiz by 11:59 pm.

***Week 7: Volunteerism, October 11-18 -- 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. You will learn about the volunteer internship requirements and the criteria for ongoing projects. Also covered will be tips on conducting outreach 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
- Review Volunteer Portal
- Post a question based on your learning for class discussion.

Dates & Deadlines

- Oct 11: Module opens at 5 pm.
- Oct 15: Submit question/comment by 11:59 pm.
- Oct 17: Zoom course discussion at 6 pm.
- Oct 18: Complete this week's quiz by 11:59 pm.

Week 8: Final Assignments, October 18-25

During the final week of the class, you will complete a final exam and post-course survey. Track 1 students will discuss next steps as Master Composter interns.

Assignments

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

Dates & Deadlines

- Oct 18: Module opens at 5 pm.
- Oct 22: Submit question/comment by 11:59 pm.
- Oct 24: Zoom course discussion at 6 pm.
- Oct 25: Complete final exam and post-course survey by 11:59 pm.
- *Oct 25: Track 2 students complete all weekly quizzes.

Course closes, November 15

The course portal closes at midnight on November 15. Be sure to download/save any course materials by this date.