

# Compost Piles

Trinidad, Colorado · Las Animas County · Revised June 2026

## INTRODUCTION

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Composting is an eco-friendly practice, but an improperly managed compost pile near your home can become a dangerous fuel source during a wildfire, and under certain conditions, can spontaneously combust. Dry, unturned organic matter — yard waste, wood chips, and plant debris — can ignite from windblown embers and allow fire to travel directly toward structures. With a few simple steps, you can continue composting safely while protecting your home and our community.

### ⚠ Red Flag Warning Days

When the National Weather Service declares a Red Flag Warning (high wind, low humidity), suspend or relocate composting operations immediately. Close bin lids, wet down the pile exterior, and cover with a non-combustible tarp.

## BEST PRACTICES

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- **Setback distance:** Locate compost piles a minimum of **30 feet** from all structures, fences, propane tanks, and other combustibles.
- **Non-combustible container:** Use a metal or non-combustible container with a tight-fitting lid whenever possible — avoid open wood-frame bins.
- **Keep it moist:** A well-hydrated pile is far less likely to ignite. Water the pile regularly, especially during dry or windy periods.
- **Turn regularly:** Turn the pile at least every two weeks to promote decomposition and prevent internal heating that can make dry material more flammable.

- **Avoid high-fuel materials:** Do not add dry wood chips, untreated lumber scraps, sawdust, or large quantities of dry plant debris — these slow decomposition and increase fire risk.
- **Prohibited materials:** Never place charcoal ash, fireplace ash, paper products, or flammable liquids in a compost pile.
- **Surrounding clearance:** Maintain a **10-foot clearance** of mowed, green, or non-combustible vegetation around all sides of the compost pile.
- **Extreme fire conditions:** During extreme fire conditions, cover the pile with a non-combustible tarp or close the bin lid and wet down the exterior thoroughly.
- **Household awareness:** Label your compost area clearly and ensure all household members understand the safety guidelines.

## DISPOSAL OPTIONS

| Option                              | Guidance                                                                                                                        |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Finished Compost</b>             | Spread mature compost on garden beds or lawns; keep the surface layer thin and moist to minimize fire risk.                     |
| <b>Unfinished / Excess Material</b> | Bag and take to the Trinidad City Dump.                                                                                         |
| <b>CSFS Guidance</b>                | Contact the Colorado State Forest Service for guidance on managing organic debris around high fire-risk properties in our area. |

### References & Resources

- **NFPA Firewise USA®** — [firewise.org](https://www.firewise.org)
- **USDA Forest Service, Wildfire Mitigation** — [fs.usda.gov](https://www.fs.usda.gov)
- **Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS)** — [csfs.colostate.edu](https://www.csfs.colostate.edu)
- **National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC) Home Preparation Guide** — [nifc.gov](https://www.nifc.gov)