

HOME COMPOSTING

Introduction to Composting

Composting at home is easy; all it takes is a little time, effort and patience. After plants and animals die, they decompose naturally as bacteria and fungi go to work breaking down the remains. Once decayed, the original material is no longer recognizable and takes the form of a rich, dark, soil-like substance. When humans help this process along it is called composting and the product is called compost.

Why Compost?

Composting organic materials such as yard trimmings and food scraps reduces the amount of waste that ends up in landfills or combustion facilities. Preventing organics from landfills reduces the production of methane, a power greenhouse gas.

Adding compost to the soil:

- Provides valuable nutrients;
- Improves soil structure;
- Adds beneficial soil micro-organisms;
- Suppresses certain plant diseases
- Reduces the need for fertilizers and pesticides; and
- Helps prevent soil erosion and nutrient run-off.

How to Compost?

For good composting, the bacteria and fungi that do most of the work must have four things to thrive, what are captured in this simple rhyme:

- Making compost takes some care, add greens, browns water and air.

Greens are your nitrogen source and include food scraps (such as fruit and vegetable peels, coffee grounds, tea bags and old bread), fresh grass clippings fresh weeds and manure.

Browns are your carbon source and include fallen leaves, dry weeds, shredded paper, wood chips and straw. Browns provide structure for the pile, allowing air to flow more freely.

Air-Compost microorganisms need oxygen. While not necessary, turning (or mixing) the pile twice a month will add more air and speed up breakdown.

Water-Composting works best with the right amount of moisture. If the pile is too wet, add some leaves, shredded newspaper or sawdust. If it's too dry, add some water.

If you can't compost outside, go inside with a worm bin otherwise known as a vermicomposting. As worms work through the composting material in a worm bin, they create tunnels that help air to circulate throughout the bin. Red wigglers, the best kind of earthworm for a worm bin, are attracted to food odors, and eat the degrading food and microorganisms, which really reduces odors in the bin.

What Can I Compost at Home?

- Fruit and vegetables, Coffee grounds, Indoor plant trimmings, Yard trimmings and Leaves

What Can't I compost at Home?

- **NO** meat, fish, poultry, bones, or fatty foods such as cheese and oils. These attract animals and do not compost well in a home system.
- **NO** dairy products. They attract animals and do not compost well in a home system.
- **NO** cat litter or dog feces. These materials may contain disease organisms that remain after composting.
- **NO** plants that spread through stems (rhizomes) or roots (e.g. ivy, grass).

How to use compost

- Compost has many uses around the home. It is ready to use when it is dark and crumbly, and smells earthy. This usually takes 6 months to one year.
- Gardens and Lawns: Mix it into the garden soil or sprinkle it on the lawn to improve moisture retention and soil texture, and to add beneficial microorganisms and nutrients.
- Prior to adding compost to the lawn it is best to screen it with a ½ mesh or smaller screen.
- Landscaping: Use it around garden beds, trees or shrubs as a mulch.
- House Plants: Use ½ to 1/3 of your container volume instead of soil.

Problem	Cause	Solution
The Pile Smells	Too many Greens →→→ Not enough air →→→ Too much water →→→	Add more browns and turn the pile Turn the pile Add dry browns and turn the pile (Just a few drops should come out when you squeeze a handful of the partly degraded composting material)
The Pile isn't doing anything	Pile is too small →→→ Too wet/not enough air →→ There are too many browns →	Increase the size of the pile and add more material Turn the pile, add more browns Add more greens and mix in
The Pile freezes in the winter	Pile is too small and not insulated	Increase the size of the pile and add more material. Add a layer of browns around the bin as insulation.
Flies are on top of the pile	Food is not buried	Bury food three inches under browns or composting material
Animals are attracted to the bin	Food is not buried Bin is not animal resistant	Bury food three inches under browns or composting material Use ½ inch hardware cloth around the bin

Leave it on the lawn

Even better than composting grass clippings and leaves, mulch/mow them into the lawn. This can save homeowners time and can improve lawn health.