

How to Compost

Your food scraps and green waste (grass, brush, tree, flower trimmings) don't have to end up in the landfill. Repurpose them by turning them into nutrient-rich compost. Composting is a process in which food and green waste break down through a natural process and create a potent soil amendment that plants love. Composting is really easy and a great way to divert material away from the landfill and bring your garden to life!

1. Choose a Bin and a Location

Location. The location of your compost will depend on the type of climate in your area. In dry climates, your compost should be placed in a shady spot. In relatively low heat or cooler climates, your compost pile can be placed in sunny spots. For convenience, you may also want to consider placing your compost near a water source and/or near the area where you will be using your completed compost.

Containers. Composting in an outside pile is an easy way to start composting, but using bins or containers are the best way to go as they are enclosed, aid in retaining heat and typically speed up the process. There are two types of bins that you can elect to use, stationary or rotating bins.

Both bins can be purchased from your local hardware store. Composting in stationary bins requires more manual work because the compost will need to be regularly turned using a pitchfork or shovel, whereas rotating bins turn the material for you.

You can also get creative and make your own bin using chicken wire or wood. Your bin will need to be a minimum of three feet by three feet. This size allows for adequate heating of the materials. Make sure your bin can be covered or enclosed if certain weather conditions are present such as it being too hot or cold. On moderately warm days, your compost can be left uncovered.



Rotating compost bin



Wooden compost bin

2. Add Materials



Layering. Materials will need to be layered, separating the materials into browns and green categories. Brown materials are dry leaves, corn stalks, straw, bark, paper, wood chips, and sawdust. Green materials are composed of vegetable and food waste, coffee grounds, grass clippings, cow manure, and horse manure.

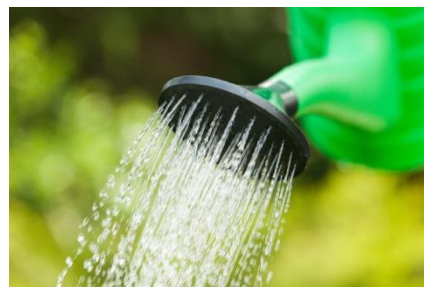
The layers will need to be three parts browns and one part greens. Any large materials such as wood will need to be chopped into smaller pieces. Each layer should not be more than two inches deep.

3. Maintaining Your Compost

Composting requires constant maintenance to ensure the materials are breaking down properly. You will need to monitor the temperature, moisture and position of your compost.

Temperature. Compost will create its own heat but it will still need to be between 70°F and 140°F. This temperature allows for a proper and rapid breakdown of materials. During the summer, your compost should not exceed 160°F because the excess heat will cause your compost to not decompose properly. In the colder months, your compost will take longer to break down because of the lack of heat.

Moisture. Proper composting requires moisture to be effective. Your compost should be consistently moist and how often you water your compost will depend on the weather and type of materials you are composting. Adding too much water can result in your compost not decomposing and too little water will kill the bacteria.



Typically green material will not need as much moisture but brown material such as wood will need more water. A great way to not over water is to soak large brown material in water before

adding it to your compost. Another way to measure the moisture in your compost is to regularly feel your compost. If your hand feels slightly wet or moist, then you don't need to add water.

Oxygen. Aeration is essential for decomposition process of your compost. You can easily keep your compost aerated by turning it once a week with a pitchfork or shovel if it is a stationary bin. If you have a rotating bin, you will simply need to spin or rotate the bin once a week as well. The more regularly you turn your compost can make the difference between waiting weeks versus months to get the nutrient rich soil you desire.

4. The Finished Product

Your compost will be ready when it is a rich dark brown soil with no remnants of food or waste. Add the nutrient rich soil to your garden and watch your plants, trees, and flowers flourish!



Common Compost Problems and Solutions

There is an odor. Properly maintained compost should be odorless. Smelly compost indicates that it's too wet and needs to be turned to allow air to get in. Adding more brown materials to your compost is another way to reduce the moisture.

Compost is attracting pests. If you find that your compost has attracted some unwanted friends then you should abstain from putting any meats, fish, or dairy in your compost. Another solution is to cover your compost with a tarp or by enclosing it in a bin.

Compost is dry. Dry compost will not break down at all. If you find that your compost is dry or dusty, add water to it and your compost should come back to life.