

What is Compost?

Compost is a dark, crumbly, and earthy smelling form of decomposing organic matter.

Why Should I make Compost?

Composting is a practical and convenient way to handle your yard and organic kitchen wastes. It can reduce your household and valuable landfill space. Compost improves your soil and the plants growing in it. If you have a garden, a lawn, trees shrubs, or even planter boxes, you have a use for compost.

By using compost, you return organic matter to the soil in a usable form. Organic matter in the soil improves plant growth by helping to breakup heavy clay soils and improving their structure, by adding water and nutrient-holding capacity to sandy soils, and by adding essential nutrients to any soil. Improving your soil is the first step toward improving the health of your plants. Healthy plants help clean our air and soil, making communities healthier places to live.



Harvesting Your Compost

After a few months, the kitchen scraps near the bottom of your compost bin will have decomposed and will look much like soil. There are two ways of harvesting this finished compost: 1) just scoop a few shovels of compost through the compost bin door; or 2) lift the compost bin up and use as much finished compost as possible.

You may want to use what's known as a trommel screen to separate unfinished material from the finish compost. You can make you own trommel screen in minutes with ¼ inch hardware cloth or old wire fencing and a wood frame.



Source information for this brochure: Cornell Cooperative Extension.

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BACKYARD COMPOSTING



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What to Compost

Your compost bin will work best if it is fed a diet of green (nitrogen-rich) and brown (carbon-rich) materials. Check out the list of kitchen and yard waste “greens” and “browns”.

KITCHEN “GREENS” Fruit & vegetable scraps Coffee grounds Rice & pasta Egg shells	KITCHEN “BROWNS” Coffee filters, stale bread, paper napkins & towels, staple-less tea bags, hair.
YARD “GREENS” Vegetables Plant trimmings Hedge clippings Grass (small amounts)	YARD “BROWNS” Leaves Straw or hay Small twigs/chips Dried grass and weeds

What not to Compost

Meat, bones and fatty foods such as cheese, salad dressing, and leftover cooking oil should be put in the garbage.



How to Compost

Composting is easy – it happens on its own. However, there are a few things you can do to speed up the composting process. Just follow these four steps:

CHOP

Chop up larger items like watermelon rinds or corn cobs before putting them in a container or directly into your compost bin.

STARTER MIX

Start with a layer of dirt in the bottom of your compost bin. Add “greens” (egg shells, food scraps); cover with “browns” (napkins, leaves) and put cover back on container. Mixture should be kept moist – like a damp sponge. Moisture and air are the key elements to a successful backyard composting program.

STIR

Mix the new material into the existing pile using a pitchfork or other garden tool. This also adds oxygen, which is a key component to successful composting.

COVER

Cover your food waste with a handful of old leaves, other dried yard waste or soil. This will add carbon and reduce the chance of odors and fruit flies. Then put the lid back on and let it “cook”.

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Common Problems and Solutions

SYMPTOM	PROBLEM	SOLUTION
The compost has a bad odor.	Not enough air.	Turn it and add coarser material (sticks, wood chips, etc.)
The center of the pile is dry.	Not enough water.	Moisten material while turning the pile.
The compost is damp and warm in the middle but nowhere else.	Pile is too small.	Collect more material and mix old material in with newer.
The heap is damp and sweet smelling, but still will not heat up.	Lack of nitrogen.	Add fresh grass clippings, fresh manure, vegetable scraps, coffee grounds.