



How to compost at home

- 1) **Designate a place in your yard to start a compost pile.** Typically you will want to find an area that is semi-shady, dry, and well-drained. You will want to make sure your pile is located close to a water source in order to add moisture as needed to your pile. If you do not have a location next to a water source, you can always add materials that are high in moisture such as grass clippings. If you are adding a lot of kitchen scraps and grass clippings, you most likely will not need to add moisture by the means of a garden hose.
- 2) **Figure out what type of bin, if any, you would like to use.** There are many different methods to compost when it comes to choosing a bin. You may accumulate the compost material in a loose pile to choosing an elaborate rotational bin system. Old wood pallets work great if you opt to build one yourself. There are also places to purchase a compost bin.
- 3) **Start adding your yard waste.** In the world of composting, gardeners talk about compost material in terms of “Greens” and “Browns.” Green material is high in nitrogen and brown materials are high in carbon. A good way to tell the difference between the two is moisture content. Green materials are typically high in moisture such as grass clippings whereas Brown materials are typically dry such as leaves. Green materials is what helps speed up the decomposition process. A 25-30:1 ratio of C:N is ideal for composting. You can achieve this ratio by mixing composting ingredients. “Table 1 can help you judge the ratio of your composting ingredients (Michel Jr., Heimlich and Hoitink 1999).” A general rule of thumb when mixing materials is adding one green material for every two brown materials. You also want to add materials that guarantee helpful bacteria and fungus. Cow and horse manure are plentiful in this area, however, if you do not have cow or horse manure to add to you pile, you should add a small amount of soil in order to provide your pile with a good dose of healthy bacteria and fungus. Pigeon manure is very high in phosphorous and nitrogen.

Food wastes	15:1
Sawdust, wood, paper	400:1
Straw	80:1
Grass clippings	15:1
Leaves	50:1
Fruit wastes	35:1
Rotted manures	20:1
Cornstalks	60:1
Alfalfa hay	12:1

Food wastes should **not** include meats, fat, grease, oil, bones, milk or cheese.

Source: Michel Jr., F.C., J.E. Heimlich and H.A.J. Hoitink. 1999. Composting at home. Ohio State University Extension factsheet. COM-001-99., 6 pgs.

- 4) **Your compost is finished.** Good compost looks and feels like chocolate cake crumbs. It is dark brown to black. Your compost should smell earthy or musty. You should not see any recognizable substances such as leaves. A few identifiable wood pieces are fine. Your material should be soil like. If you are using a bin, the finished stuff will be at the bottom part of your bin. Some bins have a small hatch at the bottom for easy removal. Depending on if you managed your compost-meaning, you made sure you have good C:N ratios, oxygen and moisture-will depend on the length of time you will have your finished product. Compost can take anywhere from a few months to a few years to decompose depending on how you decide to manage your pile.





Frequently asked questions

I am afraid that my compost pile will smell? Compost piles typically do not smell. There are things you can do to prevent your pile from smelling.

My pile does smell, what can I do? Your pile either needs more oxygen, or it is too wet or compacted, or there is not enough carbon type materials. By mixing your pile up, and adding Brown materials (high in carbon), your pile should not smell.

Will my compost pile attract varmints? Your pile should not attract any pests. You need to avoid composting meat scraps, fat, grease, oil, bones, milk, cheese, yogurt as this will attract certain types of pests.

What can I put in my compost pile? There are many things that can be composted such as grass clippings, leaves, kitchen refuse (ex: carrot peelings, banana peels, melon rinds, egg shells, tea bags and coffee grounds), hay or straw, manure, dryer lint, pet/human hair, paper products, wood shavings, sawdust and small amount of non-chemically treated wood ashes.

What should I avoid putting in my pile? Avoid meats, fats, grease, oil, bones, chemically treated wood, charcoal and coal ashes, rocks, cat and dog droppings. Be careful when adding weeds (especially if they have gone to seed, you will want your pile hot -140 degrees for at least 2 weeks-you can buy a compost thermometer), sod (grass may still grow unless your pile is hot), diseased plants (again, you will want a hot pile), and pine needles (regulate this one as this type of materials can make your compost acidic).

Why do I have to turn my pile and how often should I do this? You are adding oxygen into your pile when you turn the materials and also distribute moisture throughout your pile. This helps speed up the decomposition process as well as stop any foul odors that may be emitting out of your pile. You can turn your pile as often or as least often as you like-weekly to monthly. Remember, the right amount of oxygen and moisture are beneficial to your pile, so if you want a highly managed pile that is decomposing quickly, turn it weekly. Older piles do not need to be turned as often as new compost piles.

Where is the best place to put a compost pile? Find a dry, partially sunny to mostly shady spot. If your spot is too sunny, your materials will dry out quickly.

Is there a specific size I want my compost pile? The ideal pile size should be around 3 to 5 feet tall with equal length and width.

How can I make my pile turn into compost faster? Manage your pile. The more effort you put into your pile, the faster it will decompose. When you manage your pile, you are paying attention to Carbon:Nitrogen ratios, moisture levels and oxygenation of your pile. The moisture content should be that of a wrung out sponge.

What are some helpful composting tools? You will want a water hose with a spray nozzle, a square-point shovel or machete and a pitchfork. The hose is to make sure your pile has adequate moisture. Be careful with this one, you may be surprised at just how much moisture your pile really does have. Too much moisture is often worse for your pile than a little of moisture. The shovel or machete is to help chop up big materials if you want these items to decompose faster. The pitchfork is useful for turning your materials in order to oxygenate the pile for faster decomposition.

Why does compost make soil healthier? Compost is a natural slow-release fertilizer, adding organic nutrients back into the soil. This stimulates beneficial microorganisms that help plants root systems uptake nutrients & help suppress plant diseases and pests. Compost also fixes soil composition by correcting clay soils (helps root penetration) and sandy soils (helps soil hold in water and nutrients). Compost can also balance out your soils pH levels and help suppress plant disease. Compost acts as an erosion control among other things.

How does composting help the environment? You are helping contribute to the natural system of recycling. By recycling your yard waste you are saving landfill space (according to the EPA, yard waste & kitchen waste contribute to 25% of total waste generated) and adding precious nutrients back into your soil without the use of harmful pesticides and chemical fertilizers.

Can I use too much compost on my garden? Yes. Many plants can not grow in straight compost, therefore, you can overdo your compost application. Compost can be too much of a nutrient therefore providing rapid growth at the expense of fruit production. Also, compost that is not completely decomposed may continue to decompose when added to soil in large amounts-this may tie up or remove soil nutrients until the decomposition process has slowed.

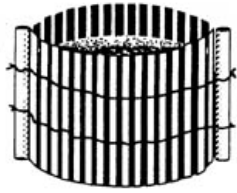
My compost pile is hot! Is that okay? That is wonderful, it means that your pile is decomposing fast. The ideal temperature for your pile is to reach and stay at 140 degrees F for two weeks. This will ensure that any weed seeds or diseased plants will not make it to your finished compost product. Your pile should get hot in the beginning and then start to cool off as the process wears on. Adding materials high in nitrogen (wet, fresh materials such as grass & kitchen scraps) will help heat your pile up.

I want to compost my table scraps, but I live in an apartment complex, is there another way that I can compost? You can vermicompost. Vermicomposting is ideal for apartment dwellers or those who do not have space in their yard; it does not smell and it is very easy. All you need is a plastic tote, red wigglers (not night crawlers as they will just die), newspaper for bedding, and plenty of kitchen scraps.

I do not have time to manage my pile, what else can I do? If you do not want to manage your pile, just find an area to place a bin or materials that is out of the way and just start adding to your pile. Eventually, the pile will decompose, but it could take a few years. The natural decomposition process will happen even with a Carbon:Nitrogen ratio of 1:1.

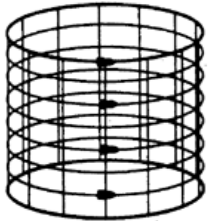
I think composting is important, but it does not seem like it fits my lifestyle right now, does the Environmental Department have any programs I can participate in? We have numerous drop site areas around Cache County for collecting Green Waste materials. We also accept Green Waste at the landfill's Green Waste facility for free. We have a curbside program that is limited to certain cities in Cache County. All the materials collected are recycled into compost, mulch, and wood chips. Call **716-9755** for more information.

TYPES OF HOME COMPOST BINS



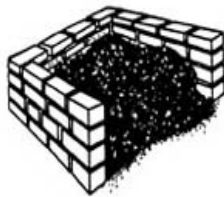
SNOW FENCE BIN

Bins made with prefabricated snow fencing are simple to make and easy to move and store. To build this bin, buy the appropriate length of prefabricated fencing, and fasten two-by-fours as corner posts to the bottom to form a circle.



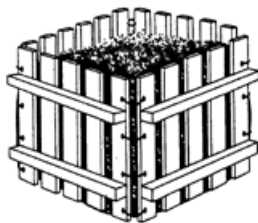
WOVEN WIRE BIN

One easy to make, economical container requires only a length of woven wire fencing. Multiply the diameter you want for the compost heap by 3.2 for the length of fencing to purchase. Fasten the ends with wire or three or four small chain snaps (available at any hardware store) to make a circle.



BLOCK BIN

Compost bins can be made with cement blocks or rocks. Just lay the blocks without mortar; leave spaces between each block to permit aeration. Pile them up to form three sides of a square container or a three-bin unit. This bin is sturdy, durable, and easily accessible. Keep the bin at least 3 inches away from the walls of your house to prevent deterioration of siding.



WOOD PALLET BIN

Covered bins allow convenient protection from pests and heavy rains. Construct bins with removable fronts or sides so that materials can be easily turned. Old wooden pallets can be used for construction. Wire mesh can be substituted for wooden sides to increase air flow.



TURNING BINS

This is a series of three or more bins that allows you to make compost in a short time by turning the materials on a regular schedule. Turning bins are most appropriate for gardeners with a large volume of yard trimmings and the desire to make a high-quality compost. You can also turn your compost with only one bin by removing the bin from around the heap, setting up the empty bin nearby, and forking the material into the now empty bin.



ROTATING DRUM BINS

Rotating drum bins, which turn using a hand crank, are also commercially available. If your own kitchen, yard, and garden do not generate enough material to fill your bin, ask your neighbors for their clippings and leaves, or start a neighborhood composting project.

REFERENCE: Michel Jr., F.C., J.E. Heimlich and H.A.J. Hoitink. 1999. Composting at home. Ohio State University Extension factsheet. COM-001-99., 6 pgs.

Keep in mind that you do not need a bin to compost. You can designate a place to have an open pile in your yard. The ideal pile size should be around 3 to 5 feet tall with equal length and width. If you want a bin and do not want to make one, there are many home and garden stores that also carry plastic compost bins for purchase. Making good compost is a learning experience and after a try or so, you will continually get better. So don't give up!

★ Great bins for managing your compost pile. The other bins you can take apart and then shovel the contents back in for a more managed pile.

