

# How to Compost at Home

## What is composting?

Composting is nature's way of recycling. Composting is the natural breakdown of organic material (kitchen and yard materials) by micro-organisms (bacteria and fungi), insects and worms.

## What are the benefits of compost?

Compost returns nutrients and organic matter to the soil, and feeds beneficial micro-organisms, insects and worms. Beyond its benefit to gardens, there's another compelling reason to have some form of composting system in your yard. Putting garden and kitchen material in a compost bin removes these materials from curbside waste collection and saves landfill space. Composting reduces greenhouse gases that are produced when organic material decomposes in a landfill without oxygen.

## What can I compost?

- Kitchen scraps including vegetables and fruit scraps, bread, pasta and rice, crushed egg shells, tea bags, coffee grounds with filters and paper towels.
- Garden and yard materials such as grass clippings and dry leaves.

## What materials do not go in the backyard composter include:

- Pet manure or litter.
- Weeds that have gone to seed.
- Any diseased plants.
- Meat, fish, fowl or the bones.
- Fats or oils: e.g. dairy products, eggs, peanut butter, spreads (these materials breakdown more slowly than plant material and may attract pests or cause odours).
- Ash, sawdust or shavings from chemically treated or painted wood.

## 10 Steps to Successful Composting

All you need is a 50:50 ratio between "brown" and "green" materials, a little patience and some help from the sun.

**BROWN** materials are carbon based. They include dried grass and plants, leaves, sawdust, wood chips, straw, dried bread, shredded newspaper and coffee filters.

**GREEN** materials are nitrogen based. They include fruit and vegetable peels and cores, coffee grounds, tea bags, eggshells and garden waste.

- Locate the composting bin in an area with good drainage and one that is accessible year round (partial shade is preferred).
- Loosen the soil over the area on which you are going to place your backyard composter. This will allow soil organisms (insects and worms) to move up the pile.
- Put down a thick layer of browns (4 inches), such as dry leaves or shredded paper.
- Add a layer of greens (2-3 inches), such as kitchen scraps, garden trimmings or grass clippings and spread evenly.
- Cover green material with browns. This reduces fruit flies and odours. A layer of soil or compost will work in place of the browns. Soil and compost has the added benefit of supplying “starter” micro-organisms to accelerate the process.
- Continue to alternate layers of green & brown until your compost bin is full. Tip!! Save some bags of dry leaves every fall.
- Turning: When the backyard composter is full, mix and add air to the pile by turning with a garden fork or turning tool. Alternatively, lift compost bin off pile and place in a new location. Fork material back into bin, mixing it well.
- Monitor moisture: It should be like a wrung out sponge – damp but not soaking. Add water if pile is dry. If too wet, add some browns.
- Continue to mix the pile every 10-14 days. Note: Pile may heat up and shrink after being turned.
- After 3-4 turnings, the compost should be ready. It should be crumbly, moist, dark coloured and have an earthy smell. Allow this material to mature for a couple of months before using. Use it on flower beds, houseplants and starter boxes, vegetable gardens, around trees or shrubs and a lawn dressing when sifted.

Controlled and speedy decomposition is all about balance. If your compost pile is too full of brown then your pile will be slow to decompose. On the other hand, if the pile is too full of greens, it will turn slimy and smell bad. The goal is to have roughly equal amounts, by weight, of browns and greens.

