

Composting: Your Backyard Bonus



Composting can reduce household waste sent to landfill by up to 30%.
(Compost Council of Canada)

Recommended Reading

Compost Council of Canada
<http://www.compost.org>

Green Calgary Compost Guide
http://www.greencalgary.org/images/uploads/Compost_Guide_GC.pdf

Green Venture Composting Guide
<http://www.waste.greenventure.ca/backyard-composting>

Green Action Centre Composting Resources
<http://www.greenactioncentre.ca/program/composting>

How to Build Your Own Composter
<http://www.rrfb.com/build-your-own-composter.asp>

Follow these simple instructions to turn your kitchen scraps and yard waste into a nutrient-rich fertilizer that your plants will love!

What is Composting?

- Composting is the natural process of decomposition and recycling of organic material into humus, which is a rich soil additive. Compost improves soil quality by providing important nutrients and helps retain moisture, which will improve plant health.

Benefits of Composting

- Composting decreases the amount of garbage you put out for curbside collection which reduces municipal collection and disposal costs.
- Landfills are designed to keep air and moisture out, which are necessary for decomposition. Methane gas and leachate are produced when organics break down under these conditions, so putting less organic waste into your household trash will prolong the life of the landfill.
- Compost is a valuable end product that improves soil and plant health, prevents erosion, retains moisture, and replenishes nutrients in soil. This reduces the need to water gardens and eliminates the need to purchase other fertilizers.
- Compost is FREE!

Getting Started

- Composting can take place in a bin or a pile. Bins help keep the compost neatly contained and can keep animals and pests out. You can purchase a composting bin or build your own from wood or wire mesh.
- The best place for your composter is in a convenient, sunny location on level ground with adequate drainage.
- Place a layer of sticks at the bottom of your composter to keep the pile aerated, and then alternate layers between browns and greens (see reverse side). Avoid adding thick layers of any one type of waste.
- The process requires moisture and oxygen so it's important to keep your pile moist and turn it regularly with a shovel or pitchfork. For finished composter sooner, stir it as often as every 3 to 5 days. Otherwise, turning every couple of weeks in warm weather will be sufficient.

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What Can Be Composted?

The “recipe” for successful composting is a ratio between “browns” (carbon sources) and “greens” (nitrogen sources). Remember: the smaller the particles, the quicker they will break down so be sure to chop up larger scraps like corn cobs before placing them in the composter.

Greens (Nitrogen-rich Sources)

Kitchen scraps such as:

- Fruit & vegetable peels and cores
- Egg shells
- Coffee grounds & filters
- Tea bags
- Cut flowers

Browns (Carbon-rich Sources)

Yard waste such as:

- Dried leaves
- Wood chips or shavings
- Straw
- Dried cut grass
- Weeds before they go to seed

Do Not Compost

- Meat
- Bones
- Dairy products
- Cooking oil
- Rhubarb leaves
- Human or pet wastes
- Charcoal or coal ashes
- Inorganic material such as plastics

Troubleshooting Tips

- **Too dry/wet:** If your compost mixture is too dry (ie. dust appears when you turn it, it doesn't stick together when you squeeze a handful) then add water. You can also try leaving the lid off when it rains. If it's too wet, add carbon-rich browns to absorb moisture.
- **Odours/animals/pest prevention:** Odours arise when the pile is too wet or materials are too compacted. Turn the pile to allow it to dry out and to ensure that it is well aerated. When adding new material, make a hole in the top of the pile, stir in the organics, and cover with dry ingredients such as leaves. Always try to have a layer of browns on top of your pile. While critters like worms, centipedes, and other insects should appear in your composter to help the bacteria break down the material, these actions will help make the pile less appealing to animals and prevent flies, which are attracted to the odours of the greens.
- You can also add soil at any stage of the layering process. A shovel-full of soil will introduce many soil organisms into your pile and act as an accelerator. A thin layer of soil added on the top of your pile also helps to discourage pests and prevent odours.

Using Finished Compost

- Following instructions can produce finished compost in as little as 6 months. Without adding the proper ratios or turning the pile, the process can take up to 2 years.
- Finished compost should feel like a wrung-out sponge. When you squeeze a handful of it, no more a couple drops of liquid should come out. It should be a dark brown colour, and should have a pleasant earthy smell to it.
- Wait until the pile is fully inactive before using the compost. The microbial activity generates heat, so when finished, the centre of the pile should no longer feel hot.
- Mix finished compost with garden soil to use in a flower or vegetable garden, no more than 8cm deep. You can also screen out larger items that have not broken down (twigs, etc.), return them to the pile, and spread finished compost on your lawn as a top dressing, no more than 1cm deep.

Winter Composting

- You can continue adding to your composter throughout the winter—the material won't decay until spring, but the freeze/thaw cycles make it break down quickly once spring arrives. When temperatures warm, just add a shovelful of dirt or dried leaves and give it a good mixing.



City of Thunder Bay residents can purchase backyard composters at EcoSuperior for \$30 – subsidized by the City of Thunder Bay. Must show proof of address upon purchase.

This waste reduction program is funded by the City of Thunder Bay's Infrastructure and Operations Department and delivered by EcoSuperior Environmental Programs.

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