

Composting

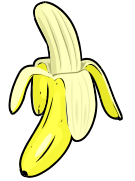
What is compost?

Compost is a dark, crumbly mixture of decomposed organic matter, such as grass clippings, leaves, twigs, and branches.

What do I put in a compost bin or pile?

Kitchen waste: banana peels, egg shells, vegetable scraps, apple peels and cores, tea bags, coffee filters and grounds

Yard waste: grass clippings, leaves, plant stalks, garden and shrubbery trimmings, old potting soil, twigs, annual weeds without seed heads, young weeds, dry leaves, chipped brush, sawdust



Do not use: diseased plants, weeds with seed heads, invasive plants, pet feces, dead animals, bread and grains, meat or fish parts, dairy products, grease, cooking oil, or oily foods

Add a small amount of soil or manure to provide sufficient microorganisms for decomposing waste



Yard Waste Compost Mixture

Green Nitrogen source: fresh grass clippings, garden and shrubbery trimmings, young weeds

Brown Carbon source: dry leaves, chipped brush, twigs, dry grass, sawdust

Mix 3 parts brown, 2 parts green, and a handful of soil for a good compost mixture.

- Material in the compost pile or bin needs to be turned or mixed for good aeration. Rotate your bin or turn your pile with a pitchfork or rake.
- Add just enough water to keep your compost moist, but not wet. Too much water causes insufficient air in the pile.
- Bury kitchen waste in the center of compost pile to keep flies and insects from being attracted to your compost pile.
- To keep compost pile from smelling bad, add more carbon sources and turn often for good aeration.



Photo from Knox County Solid Waste Management.

How long does it take for waste to decompose into compost?

The most efficient decomposing bacteria thrive in temps between 110F-160F. The hotter the pile, the faster the composting. If you have a good balance of carbon to nitrogen, provide lots of surface area within a large volume of material, and maintain adequate moisture and aeration, the temperature will rise over several days. Hot composting will take a few weeks.

Cold composting can be done by letting waste sit in a pile until it decomposes. This method requires very little work and can take up to a year. Worm composting is good for kitchen waste and will take about 3 months.



What can I use compost for?

Compost contains nutrients, but is not a substitute for fertilizer; compost holds nutrients in the soil until plants can use them. Compost loosens and aerates clay soils, and retains water in sandy soils.

- To use as a soil amendment, mix 2-5 inches of compost into vegetable and flower gardens each year before planting.
- In a potting mixture, add one part compost to two parts commercial potting soil, or make your own mixture by using equal parts of compost and sand or perlite.
- As a mulch, spread an inch or two of compost around annual flowers and vegetables, and up to 6 inches around trees and shrubs.
- As a top dressing, mix finely sifted compost with sand and sprinkle evenly over lawns.



Photo courtesy of Vincennes YMCA.

Build a compost bin in your backyard!

Compost bins can be made of wood, snow fence, chicken wire, or a barrel with holes that you can rotate.

