



## Composting How-To

**Composting** is the decomposition of plant remains and other once-living materials to make an earthy, dark, crumbly substance that is excellent for adding to houseplants or enriching garden soil. It is the way to recycle your yard and kitchen wastes, and is a critical step in reducing the volume of garbage needlessly sent to landfills for disposal. It's easy to learn how to compost. For more easy tips click [here](#).

There are a tremendous number of options for containing your compost. Some people choose to go bin less, simply building a compost pile in a convenient spot on the ground. Others build bins from materials such as recycled pallets, or two-by-fours and plywood. And, of course, there are many commercial bins on the market.

**Composting** is not a new idea. In the natural world, composting is what happens as leaves pile up on the forest floor and begin to decay. Eventually, the rotting leaves are returned to the soil, where living roots can finish the recycling process by reclaiming the nutrients from the decomposed leaves. Composting may be at the root of agriculture as well. Some scientists have speculated that as early peoples dumped food wastes in piles near their camps, the wastes rotted and were terrific habitat for the seeds of any food plants that sprouted there. Perhaps people began to recognize that dump heaps were good places for food crops to grow, and began to put seeds there intentionally.

Today, the use of composting to turn organic wastes into a valuable resource is expanding rapidly in the United States and in other countries, as landfill space becomes scarce and expensive, and as people become more aware of the impacts they have on the environment. In ten years, composting will probably be as commonplace as recycling aluminum cans is today, both in the backyard and on an industrial scale. Many states in the USA have stated goals or legislative mandates to drastically reduce the volume of waste being sent to landfills. Utilizing yard and kitchen wastes (which make up about 30% of the waste stream in the USA is a big part of the plan to minimize waste overall).

You can contribute to the '**composting revolution**' by composting your own yard and kitchen wastes at home. If you have a large yard, you might prefer the ease of composting in a three-bin system out by the back fence. [Richland County Solid Waste Management Authority](#) promotes composting through home composting education efforts and the collection of yard wastes for large-scale composting. Whatever your style of composting, there's plenty of room to get involved!

**Good Composting** is a matter of the proper environmental conditions for microbial life. Compost is made by billions of microbes that digest yard and kitchen wastes (food scraps) you provide them. If the pile is cool enough, worms, insects and etc help out the microbes to assist in the breakdown. All of these come into play to make compost out of your yard and kitchen wastes under most conditions. There are three major contributors to a good compost: ([for more easy tips from the Ohio](#)

[EPA click here](#))

**Air:** Composting microbes do not do their work well without sufficient aeration. Without air, your compost pile will be taken over by anaerobic microbes and, while still decomposing, tends to convert to a garbage like decomposition (smelly!) which none of your neighbors will appreciate. To make sure you have enough aeration for your compost, thoroughly break up or mix in any ingredients that tend to mat down (like green grass clippings or wet leaves with a spade or garden fork, then pile it back on to get back to work.

**Water:** Your pile should be wet but not soaked or under water. Too dry and the decomposition will slow down - too wet and you have smelly problems.

To be sure that you have plenty of moisture, add your kitchen scraps (fruit and vegetable cuttings are great) to your pile often to promote proper moisture.

**Food:** There are two major types of "food" that your compost pile will contain - browns and greens. Browns are dry or dead plant matter as in straw, dry weeds, autumn leaves, wood chips or sawdust (you may want to limit larger wood chips as they take longer to break down) and are the dryer part of your pile. The greens - fresh plant matter, green weeds, kitchen fruit, vegetable scraps, coffee grounds, and tea bags. The greens provide a great source of nitrogen and is critical to the microbes.

**Other things** that affect your compost is the weather - warm or cold temperatures will speed up (warm is good) or slow down (cold) your decomposition of your compost. In the winter in colder climates (OHIO!) your compost pile will go dormant - but will start up again in the spring.

**Compost** is ready for use when it is dark in color and smells earthy (like soil) and it is difficult to recognize any of the ingredients - they just look like dirt. For most outdoor garden use it is fine to use compost that isn't quite "done" as it will finish in the soil and add enrichment to your garden.

**Why Compost?** Compost does several things to benefit the soil that synthetic fertilizers cannot do. First, it adds organic matter, which improves the way water interacts with the soil. In sandy soils, compost acts as a sponge to help retain water in the soil that would otherwise drain down below the reach of plant roots (in this way, it protects plants against drought). In clay soils, compost helps to add porosity (tiny holes and passageways) to the soil, making it drain more quickly so that it doesn't stay waterlogged and doesn't dry out into a brick like substance. Compost also inoculates the soil with vast numbers of beneficial microbes (bacteria, fungi, etc.) and the habitat that the microbes need to live. These microbes are able to extract nutrients from the mineral part of the soil and eventually pass the nutrients on to plants.