

Resources To Help You Make Compost

Here are some Web sites that provide information about composting at home.

Backyard Magic: The Composting Handbook is an online handbook on how to turn household waste into a valuable soil conditioner.

<https://compostingcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/CompostingHandbook.pdf>

The Compost Resource Page has information for beginners and experienced composters alike:

<http://www.howtocompost.org/>

This web resource, *Composting in Your Backyard*, provides helpful information on composting, including common problems and their solutions, as well as how to winterize your compost pile (Minnesota-style):

<https://www.pca.state.mn.us/waste/composting-your-backyard>

Consider using a worm bin to help you transform your compostable household scraps into compost year-round in your basement!

Mary Appelhof wrote the 1982 classic, *Worms Eat My Garbage*; Joanne Olszewski updated it in 2017: *Worms Eat My Garbage, 35th Anniversary Edition*. For more information, see <http://www.wormwoman.com/>

This web site includes a video on creating and setting up your own worm bin:

<https://www.pca.state.mn.us/living-green/composting-food-scraps-indoors>

These local businesses pick up your compostable household scraps for offsite composting efforts:

- 3 Earth Stew, 608-213-6990
<https://www.earthstew.com/>
- 3 Rooted Curbside Compost, 608-205-7971
<http://www.rootedcurbsidecompost.com/>

Eco-Action Tuesdays

Eco-Action Tuesdays is a program series based on the “ripple effect”.

Beginning in our own backyard, we explore sustainability issues through hands-on, entertaining presentations on the fourth Tuesday, March–October.

Discover how the eco-actions you take at home—and share with others—can ripple throughout the community, creating a healthier, more sustainable place.

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Composting Challenge

Why Should I Make Compost?

Using kitchen scraps, grass clippings, and fallen leaves to make compost reduces the amount of waste a family creates and keeps plant-based material out of landfills.

In landfills, plant material creates methane through anaerobic decomposition. Methane is a harmful greenhouse gas. Plant materials in home composters biodegrade (or decay) by aerobic decomposition, especially when you aerate the compost by turning it or stirring it. Aerobic decomposition does not create methane.

Adding compost to your garden and plants and trees in your yard feeds them with the nutrients (vitamins and minerals) in the compost. Plants need nutrients to be healthy and grow.

What *Is* Compost?

Compost is decomposed plant-based material. It looks like dirt, but it's really broken up plants. When plants and things made from plants get old, they dry up, turn brown, and decay. The same good stuff—vitamins, minerals, and helpful nutrients—that were part of the plant when it was alive are now part of the compost. Make sure to use only healthy ingredients in your compost!

What sorts of things can you compost? Plant-based materials!

- Leftover fruits and vegetables from meals or snacks, or food that has started to decay (“go bad”)
- Old bread, noodles, rice, cereal (wheat and other grains are plants)
- Green grass clippings and green leaves
- Brown leaves that fall from trees in autumn
- Soft bark that might have fallen off a tree, and very tiny twigs
- Coffee grounds and paper coffee filters; tea leaves and tea bags
- Egg shells (Although they come from an animal, egg shells are mostly made of calcium, an important nutrient!)
- Brown paper products: bags, paper towels and napkins, plates, and cardboard (These products don't have to be clean: for example, a pizza box can't be recycled because it has food waste on it, but it CAN be composted to keep it out of a landfill!)

Things that should not be composted are meats, oils, and dairy products. When they get old, they start to smell *bad* to humans and *good* to hungry racoons and skunks. Food that doesn't come from plants can also slow down the process of decomposition in the compost.



How Can I Make Compost?

It's easy to make compost! Begin by keeping a container with a tight-fitting lid in the kitchen under the sink or on the counter to gather food scraps until you take them to compost outside.

Find a sunny place in your yard not too far from your house, but far enough away from your neighbors' houses. If you have a garden, this would be a good place for your composting materials. It can be a free-standing heap or pile; it can be enclosed with wire, wood, or even a pre-made composter. Look online or check out a book at the library to find composter ideas.

Start adding materials. Combine:

- Green materials—Food we eat and anything green, such as grass clippings, plant clippings, and green leaves
- Brown materials—Brown and woody things that come from trees, such as leaves that fall in autumn, paper, cardboard, or sawdust

Add more brown than green materials. In general, the quickest way to make compost is to add 3 parts of brown materials to 1 part of green materials. There isn't a perfect ratio, so experiment! Materials in smaller pieces compost faster, so tear, cut, and shred what you can to make the starting materials smaller.

Give your compost a drink of water, enough to keep it moist. Add more water in dry weather, and none when it rains. Give the compost some air; turn it or stir it once or twice a month. Compost needs food, water, air, and warmth just like we do!

Once the first stages of decomposition start, little critters will begin to live in the compost and help break down the green and brown materials more. You might find worms, beetles, slugs, snails, ants, roly-polys (pill millipedes) and earwigs.



Take the Composting Challenge!

1. **Compost Ingredients.** List 10 things you can compost.
2. **Fill It Up!** Get an empty pail or bag and take a walk inside your house and outside in your yard. Look for things you can compost and add them to the pail or bag. What did you find?
3. **Kitchen Compost Container.** Set up a compost container in the kitchen to collect food scraps. When it's full, take it out to the composter and empty it. Describe your kitchen compost container.
4. **Create a Composter.** You can construct a composter in many ways; one way is to simply form some wire fencing into a cylinder shape. Learn about different composter types and decide with your family to make a composter. What does it look like? What is it made of?
5. **The Ratio.** When putting material in the composter, it is important to use a “ratio”: adding more brown materials than green materials. What are some brown items? What are some green items?
6. **Add Water and Stir.** The material in the composter needs water during the summer. It also helps to add air by turning or stirring the contents. You should do this often during the summer. How many times did you add water and stir the contents in July?
7. **It's Alive!** At the end of July, see how many different critters you can find in your composter. Did you find a worm? What else did you find?
8. **Composter Glossary.** The material you put into your composter will eventually become compost! Many changes happen along the way. Some words to describe this process include: Aerobic; Anaerobic; Biodegrade; Decay; Decomposition; Methane; and Nutrients. Try out a new word in your compost glossary by writing the definition of one of them in your own words.

