

# Making Compost

Composting turns common household scraps and yard waste into nutrient-rich fertilizer and soil amendment. You can work compost into garden beds every spring to give annuals and perennials a quick, natural boost. Compost is also the perfect ingredient for vegetable gardens, supplying essential nutrients and helpful soil microbes.

## Preparing for a Compost Bin or Compost Pile

Select an area for your compost pile or bin, look for a spot that gets a lot of sunlight and has nearby access to water.

Build or purchase compost bins. A small fenced area with no bottom allows worms and other beneficial organisms to work and aerate the compost. Bins, with or without a bottom, can be made with wood to contain the compost.

Ready-to-use compost bins can be purchased and quickly put to work. They keep the pile contained and looking neat, while protecting the compost from the weather and animals.

### **Good to Know**

Consider setting up two compost areas; one that is being added to and one that is ready to use as a soil amendment.

## Start Your Compost

Efficient decomposition requires nitrogen (kitchen scraps), carbon (yard waste), oxygen (air) and water.

### **Step 1**

Collect kitchen scraps for the compost pile in an airtight container with a carbon-charcoal filter to absorb odors. For more efficient composting, cut large kitchen scraps into smaller pieces. Avoid meat, bones, dairy and oils, which can smell and attract varmints and flies.

Useful items to include:

- Fruit and vegetable scraps
- Coffee grounds and tea bags
- Crushed eggshells (rinsed of whites and yolks)
- Shredded newspaper (not glossy magazines)
- Fireplace ashes
- Sawdust

## Step 2

When collection container is nearly full, empty the scraps into the compost bin or pile.

## Step 3

Add a layer of leaves and a layer of grass clippings or weeds (only if they haven't yet formed seeds.) If not available, add straw.

## Step 4

Moisten and mix the compost pile every few weeks. Water the pile, then use a pitchfork or shovel to turn the compost so that the oxygen reaches all the ingredients to encourage decomposition.

## Step 5

Adjust the proportion of compost ingredients by odor. The compost should have a good earthy smell. If the compost has an ammonia odor, add more carbon materials such as leaves and newspaper. If the compost smells foul, it is probably too wet and needs more dry materials such as leaves or straw.

## Step 6

Allow the compost materials to decompose before use. The compost should look dark, feel crumbly and smell earthy. The process typically takes a few months, depending on ingredients. Do not use compost before it's ready as the decomposing ingredients can attract pests.

**Caution:** To make sure there is sufficient moisture, examine a clump of the material. It should be damp, but not soggy and dripping.

# Use Your Compost

- **As a mulch.** Spread 2-3 inches of compost around plants to help keep plant roots moist and cool and prevent weeds. Replenish compost mulch once or twice a year, since it will break down.
- **As a soil amendment.** Enrich soil with compost. Flowers, vegetables and fruits will benefit from the added nutrients and beneficial microbes contained in the compost.
- **As a tonic.** Create a compost tea by soaking a shovelful of compost in a bucket of water for 3-4 days. Pour the liquid over your plants for a quick, nutritious supplement.
- **As a fertilizer.** Spread about 1 inch of compost to your lawn, and rake it into the grass as a quick fertilizer. This is especially effective when done immediately after aerating the lawn.