

Why and How to COMPOST?

Food scraps and leftover food make up 20% of the waste in a municipal trash stream. Much of that food waste can be composted, and turned into nutrient filled soil for gardens, or even as a top dressing for your lawn. Why buy soil additives when you can make it yourself for free, lessen your trash or sewage (garbage disposal) bill and know exactly how it was made? It is even a great way to get rid of your shredded personal documents!

Composting seems so overwhelming when you think about it for the first time; you are worried about the cost, smell, location and animals. There are many different ways to compost; some expensive and complicated but many are easy and cheap. The 20/20 compost bin is a great starter bin, it is cheap, has a lid to keep smells in and animals out. Take an old garbage can with a lid or buy a new one for about \$20, drill lots air holes on the sides and a few on the bottom and 20 minutes later you have a compost bin! When you are comfortable with composting and want to move on to bigger enclosed containers there are many varieties on the market to choose from. Some people with more land will make a pile in the back corner of their lot and some people will make little pens for the different stages of composting and others still make little pockets of compost by digging an 18 inch deep hole adding just “greens” cover it up and wait a few months.

The only true recipe for compost is the 3 parts brown to 1 part green, keep moist and no meat, dairy or human, cat or dog waste. Brown material provides carbon and includes: paper, like shredded pieces of newspaper, cardboard, and paper towels, dry yard waste, like brown dry leaves, small branches, and twigs, straw, sawdust, used potting soil, cardboard type egg cartons or drink trays from fast food chains. Green material provides nitrogen and includes: wet yard waste like fresh grass clippings, green leaves, and garden prunings, food scraps like vegetable and fruit peels, cores and rinds, coffee grounds, and tea bags. No meat, dairy, oil or fats, human, cat or dog waste.

Add brown and green materials (generally three parts browns to one part greens), making sure larger pieces are chopped or shredded. The ideal compost pile contains browns and greens (of varying sizes) placed in alternate layers of different-size particles, to prevent matting. Add a scoop or two of soil to add good helpful bacteria to the mix. Add some water; you want it moist but not soggy.

Mix grass clippings and green waste into the pile and bury fruit and vegetable waste under a few inches of compost material. As materials breakdown, the pile will get warm and on cold days you may even see some steam. If you pile starts to smell, chances are you have too many “greens” and not enough “browns”. Every time you add to the pile, turnover and fluff it with a fork to provide aeration, unless your bin has a turner, and add water to keep moist.

When material at the bottom is dark and rich in color, with no remnants of your food or yard waste, your compost is ready to use. This might take a few months depending on your conditions. There may be a few chunks of woody material left; these can be screened out and put back into a new pile. The resulting compost can be applied to lawns and gardens to help condition the soil and replenish nutrients. Compost should not be used as potting soil for houseplants because it may still contain vegetable and grass seeds.

As you can see it really isn't that complicated or expensive, but there are even easier and cheaper ways to take care of your yard waste. One of the easiest ways is to add “grasscycling” to your lawn care plan.

Grasscycling is simply mowing leaving the grass clippings fall to the ground instead of collecting and falling between the other grass, decomposing and adding free nitrogen to the lawn. To prevent clumping don't mow when the grass is wet or mow more than 1 inch at a time. Putting your used coffee grounds on acidic soil plants such as azaleas, rhododendrons or blueberries is another super easy way to compost.

Vermicomposting is yet another way of composting but it uses red wiggler worms in an enclosed container is not for everyone, but the other types of composting are cheap easy and simple, give them a try.