

Backyard Organic Waste Management - Composter Information

1. Where should I put my composter?

For optimal composting, ensure the unit is:

- exposed to the sun as much as possible
- in a convenient and accessible spot for all seasons
- in a well-drained area
- close to a water source for maintenance purposes

2. How do I start composting?

- Remove the layer of grass in the desired location, and place the composter on top
- Place a layer of small branches in the bottom for air and drainage purposes.
- Empty kitchen scraps and leaf and yard waste into the composter in layers
- Adding some finished compost or soil to the composter helps to add beneficial organisms to begin the composting process
- At least twice a year (spring/fall) turn the pile over to ensure everything is well mixed



3. What organic material can go into a composter?

The composter should have:

50% nitrogen-rich content (Green) and 50% carbon-rich content (Brown).

Compost:

Green Materials - 50%

- ✓ Raw fruits and vegetables
- ✓ Coffee grounds and filters
- ✓ Tea bags
- ✓ Egg shells
- ✓ Fresh (green) yard clippings, plants and leaves

Brown Materials - 50%

- ✓ Dry yard clippings
- ✓ Dry leaves and plants
- ✓ Dry sticks (broken up)
- ✓ Hair and fur

Do NOT Compost:

- × Wood treated with chemicals
- × Dairy products
- × Meat and bones
- × Pet waste
- × Fats and oils
- × Charcoal/coal ashes
- × Crabgrass and fast-growing weeds
- × Plastics, metals, glass
- × Rhubarb leaves and other toxic plants

Do not put bio-degradable/compostable plastics (bags, cups, take out containers, utensils, etc.) into your composter. They will not break down but will create a watertight layer that will stop the whole process from working.

4. How to manage a composter?

Organic Materials:

- 50% Green waste and 50% Brown waste
- Large materials should be cut up or shredded into small pieces to aid decomposition

Moisture:

- Should be as moist as a wrung-out sponge
- When squeezing the compost there should be a few drops of water
- If the composter is too dry add water
- If composter gets too wet, add more dry materials or leave the lid off for a few sunny days

Oxygen:

- Mix/turn the pile as at least twice a year

Heat:

- Composters work best when fully exposed to the sun

Microorganisms:

- Add a layer of garden soil to make sure organisms are still present
- Cover fresh food waste with a layer of soil or leaves to reduce flies

Time:

- The more you manage your compost, the faster organics will break down

5. When can I harvest my finished compost?

A well-managed composter produces finished compost in one to two years.

6. When do I use the finished compost?

It will take a year or more after you started the composter to get finished compost. Compost should look like dark brown crumbly soil when finished. You may need to have two composters to get the best results; one to add materials to and one left to process.

7. Where do I use the finished compost?

Spread finished compost on lawns or add to gardens to return nutrients to the soil.

8. Why is my composter not doing anything?

Make sure there is enough kitchen waste and yard waste in the composter. Mix the compost pile as often as possible to ensure air circulation. Make sure there are microorganisms by adding some compost or soil to the pile. Ensure the composter is getting enough heat and add water if it becomes too dry. Remember this is a slow process!

9. Why does my composter smell?

If your composter smells, there is not enough oxygen/air circulation. This likely means there is too much wet/green material, and not enough brown material. Turning the pile and adding a layer of yard waste or soil to the top of the pile will reduce smell.

10. How do I avoid attracting wildlife?

Ensure the lid of the composter is closed tightly. Turn the pile and add some leaf and yard waste on top of the pile if there is an odor. Add deterrents like strong spices (example; paprika, cumin, etc.) or moth balls around the outside of the composter. Once the animal tastes or smells the deterrent, they will likely avoid it in the future.

11. How do I avoid attracting bears in cottage country?

Bears are not attracted to finished compost, but will be attracted to rotting food. Given that composters are not air-tight units, and in fact use air to break down organic materials, precautions should be taken when composting in bear country. **Do not put meat, fish, dairy, or grease into your compost bin.** During high bear activity times do not add fruit (especially berries and melon rinds which are particularly attractive to bears). Watch your bin for visits from furry friends that may indicate your bin is smelly. If smaller animals are visiting your bin, a bear might too.

Minimize other bear attractants like garbage cans, dirty barbecue grills, bird feeders, pet food, and citronella candles. Add dry leaf/yard, soil or pet waste on top of smelly food being added.

No composter is bear-proof, but a well-maintained composter should not produce smells that attract bears.

12. Why does my kitchen catcher and/or composter attract fruit flies and bugs?

Empty your kitchen catcher often or store your waste in the fridge/freezer. Do not let organics start to decompose in your kitchen. Rinse out kitchen bin after emptying with a water and vinegar solution.

13. How do I get rid of fruit flies?

You can make your own fruit fly trap by using a container, saran wrap, soap and fruit or liquor. Fill the container with aged fruit, beer or wine. Add a small amount of soap. Tightly saran wrap the top of your container. Poke small holes in the top of the saran wrap using a pin or needle. The fruit flies fly in through the holes, become trapped and are killed by the soap added. Clean out the container every couple of days and keep it out until you no longer see fruit flies around the house.

14. How do I manage my composter during all seasons?

Summer- Keep your composter in top condition by layering. The break down of materials will be faster because of the heat.

Fall- If compost is available, harvest the finished compost. Use as a mulch in your flower beds or vegetable garden. Turn your composter in preparation for winter. Continue to layer green and brown materials.

Winter- Keep your composter going through the winter by adding kitchen scraps regularly. Maintenance can wait until spring.

Spring- This is time for a fresh start. Empty the composter entirely. Use any finished compost in your garden. Replace any unfinished compost back in the composter and you are ready for a new composting year.

15. Diagram on how to use a composter.

