

Backyard Composting

How-to advice to get started!





- What is compost?
- Why start composting?
- Building your pile
- How do I know it's done?
- How/where do I use my compost?
- Troubleshooting
- More learning resources in the last slide



What is Compost?

- Organic material from decomposition of carbon (*dried leaves*), nitrogen (*food scraps*).
- Happens naturally – certain techniques accelerate the process.
- Dark, crumbly, soil-like.



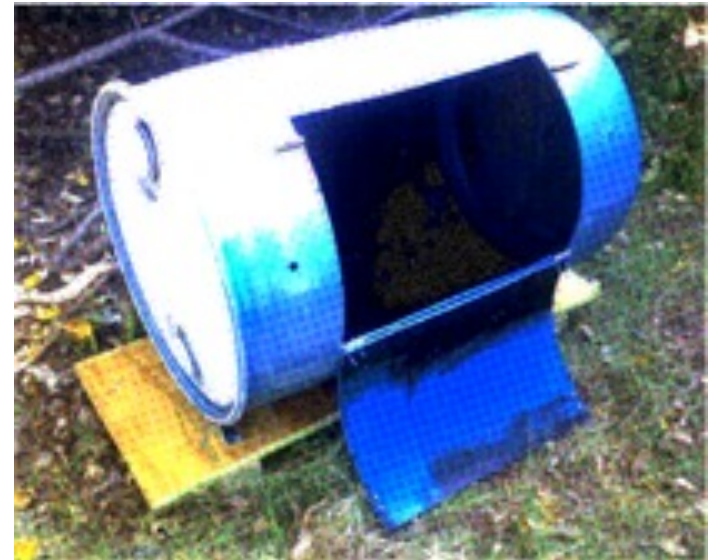
Why is it Important?

- Reduces the waste stream.
Yard and food waste = 30% of landfill
- Improves soil structure.
- Retains moisture, slows run-off from rain.
- Reduces need for fertilizer
- Reduces your carbon footprint



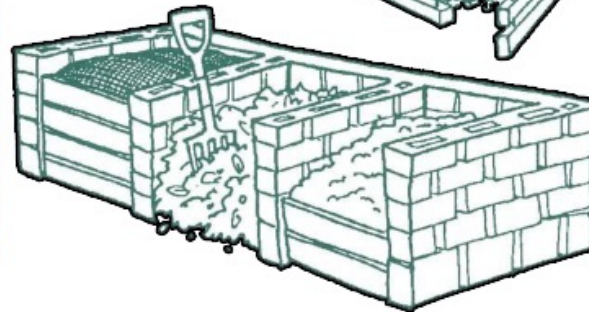
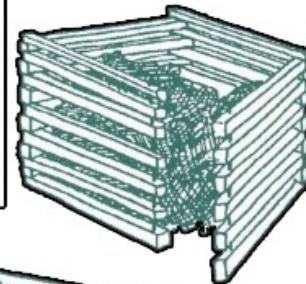
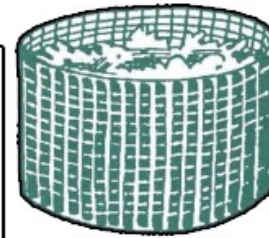
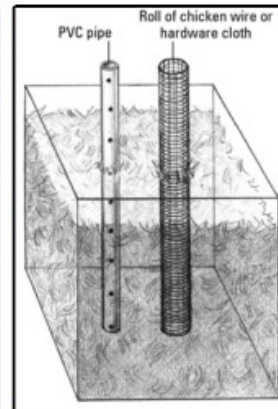
Starting a Compost Pile

- Select a location – away from the house
- You can make your own or purchase



Compost Bins

- Ideal size is 3-4 cubic ft. (27-36 cubic ft.)
Easier to turn, aerobic action
- No larger than 5 x 5 x 5
- Can become anaerobic (not enough oxygen)



What goes in your Compost?

Carbon: dried leaves,
cardboard, paper, pulp, straw

Nitrogen: food scraps, plants

Water/Moisture

Oxygen



Ratios

Try to maintain a 3 to 1 Carbon/Nitrogen Ratio

BROWNS	GREENS
Dried leaves	Kitchen scraps
Straw	Coffee grounds & filter
Shredded paper	Tea bags
Drier lint	Yard clippings
Newspaper	Pet hair
Pine needles	Manure (from herbivores*)
Sawdust	
Paper bags	



A Few Things to Avoid

- Meat, bones
- Dairy products
- Fats and oils
- Pet feces (*dog, cat, other carnivores*)

These can attract critters you don't want, may create odd odors, or contain harmful bacteria/parasites.

Turning your pile adds Oxygen

Keep the worms, bugs, microbes happy and eating your browns and greens.

Use a pitch fork to turn the pile.



Active (hot) vs. Passive (cool)

- **Hot composting**

- Involves creating ideal environment for microbial processes.
- Piles require more attention.
- Temperatures reach 110 to 140.
- Compost can be finished in three to four months.

- **Cool composting**

- **Continuous pile.** Add material as it's available.
- **Trench.** Kitchen scraps placed 12" deep and covered immediately. Typically near garden.
- **Sheet.** Layers of newsprint, yard waste, dried leaves. Ready in six to eight months (next season).

How to use your Compost

- **Mulch** for garden, fruit trees
- **Top dressing** on flowering plants
- **Soil improvement**, helps to change structure
 - Enhances moisture retention in sandy soil
 - Improves drainage in clay soil
 - Attracts earthworms which aerate soil



Troubleshooting

Materials not decomposing:

Add water, turn pile to add oxygen, add more greens

Ammonia and/or rotten odor:

Add browns such as leaves, straw, or shredded cardboard/paper, bury food scraps, turn pile

Critters in your pile!:

Ensure you bury your food scraps,
Cover pile with burlap or hardware cloth



Unrelenting fruit flies from hell (UFFFFH):

Make sure to cover your pile in a
thick layer of browns, or use fabric
such as burlap, placing your compost pile in shade
also helps with this, as fruit flies favor sunlit areas

Summary: Top 10 Reasons to Compost

10. Be environmentally responsible.
9. Reduce need for chemical fertilizers, mulch.
8. Create a healthy landscape.
7. Improve the quality of your soil.
6. Reduce amount of yard waste going to landfill.
5. Protect the local watershed.
4. Decrease water use in your landscape.
3. Protect privacy. You can use shredded personal papers!
2. It's easy. Good exercise.
1. You can use it to grow your own food!



Compost Demonstration Sites

Master Gardeners in our area offer how-to advice at various locations in Montgomery County (PA) from April to November. Call your local recycling program. You may qualify for a free compost bin!





Resources to Learn More

- The Complete Guide to Home Composting by Joe Gardener
<https://joegardener.com/resources/>
- My online personal knowledge repository on Composting
<https://github.com/berttejeda/bert.composting>
- Check nearby nurseries, libraries, B&N, etc
[Let Me Google That For You](#)



Shopping List



Bokashi Composting Starter Kit ([amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com))



Vremi Kitchen Compost Bin for Counter or Under Sink - 1.2 Gallon ([amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com))



Worm Factory 360 WF360B
Worm Composter ([amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com))