



Backyard Composting

Composting is a great way to recycle *all* types of yardwaste and provide a free source of compost - a nutrient-rich material that has many uses. A compost pile naturally breaks down yardwaste into compost right in your backyard, saving you the time and energy of bagging yardwaste, storing it, and then

hauling it to the curb or drop-off center.

Compost piles require only a minimal amount of maintenance to produce a useable product that is a valuable soil amendment. Organic compost loosens soil for better root penetration, improves soil capacity to hold water, and adds essential nutrients to soil.

To download "Backyard Composting: a beginner's guide" [click here](#). (If you choose to print this brochure, be sure choose the duplex/double-sided option and fit to printable area for correct layout.)

For helpful composting tips, seasonal reminders, and fun stories about composting in Hamilton County, check out the Hamilton County Solid Waste Management District's composting blog [Confessions of a Composter](#).

Composting Basics

You can compost with very little effort. Composting can be as simple as throwing organic materials into a pile and letting nature do its work. A mix of carbon and nitrogen sources, such as leaves and grass, is needed to get started. Turning the pile once every month or two will keep the process going. This form of composting is simple and requires little effort, but it will take you a year or longer to produce compost.

For faster results, just put in a little more effort. By building a bin, turning the pile every two to four weeks, and getting a good mix of carbon (i.e., leaves) and nitrogen (i.e., grass), a compost pile can decompose very quickly. Properly managed piles can break down organic material into compost in three months or less.

Pick a Good Spot

Choose a composting site with plenty of room that is comfortable to work around and won't interfere with your family's lawn and garden activities. A shady, protected area is best because wind and direct sunlight will dry the pile, slowing decomposition.

Your compost pile should stay moist, so exposure to rain is fine, but make sure the area has good drainage.

Since you may need to water the pile during dry spells, keep it within reach of a garden hose.

Your compost pile should not be located against wooden buildings or trees; wood in direct contact with compost will decay.

A Hot Pile Means It's Working

A properly made compost pile will reach a temperature of 90 – 140° F in four to five days. You can purchase a temperature probe or soil thermometer at garden or hardware stores or through the Internet. You will notice the pile settling - a good sign that it is working!

Turning the Pile

After five or six weeks, turn the materials in the pile. You should not need to turn the compost pile a second time; however, you can make compost faster by turning the pile more often.

Compost is ready to use when it is dark brown, crumbly, and earthy-smelling. For best results, let it stabilize a few extra days and sift it through a one-half inch screen (optional). When screening compost, be sure to use gloves and wash hands when finished.

General Guidelines for Backyard Composting

Space - A minimum of 3 ft. x 3 ft. x 3 ft. of space is required to maintain the proper volume needed for an active compost pile.

Bin - Placing yardwaste in a bin is recommended but not essential. The bin provides an attractive, controlled environment to contain the material. For more on compost bins, [click here](#).

Oxygen - Turning the pile provides oxygen to the bacteria and other microorganisms doing the work.

Water - The pile should be moist like a damp sponge. With rain, the pile may stay moist without help. During dry spells, use a hose to keep the pile damp.

Material or Food - The microorganisms working to break down the pile need two types of food, carbon and nitrogen. To find out what should be composted, read on to learn about what is included in a compost recipe.

Compost Recipe

Building a compost pile is similar to a pot of soup - collect a few ingredients, mix well, and stir. When gathering materials to compost, remember that a good mix of high carbon material ("brown stuff") and high nitrogen material ("green stuff") is needed. The ideal mix of browns to greens is 3:1. Almost all natural, organic material will compost but not everything belongs in a compost pile. Here are some do's and don'ts:

CAN be composted:

Fruit and vegetable scraps

Leaves

Green plants

Coffee grounds

Tea bags

Grass clippings

Manure from animals that do not eat meat

Flowers

Pine needles

Wood chips

Shredded newspaper

Wood ash

Straw

Sawdust

Cornstalks

Alfalfa hay

Brush and shrub trimmings

Prunings

Always place food waste in the middle of your compost pile to avoid odors and pests. Using a covered compost bin when composting food wastes helps prevent raccoons. Additionally, be sure to wear gloves and wash your hands when working with compost.

DO NOT Compost:

Oils/fats/grease

Bones

Meat

Weed seeds

Salad dressing

Diseased plants or weeds

Inorganic material (i.e., plastic)

Butter or dairy products

Cat or dog manure

Common Problems and Solutions

My compost pile has a bad odor.

If your compost pile has a bad odor, it is most likely due to one of the following causes: not enough air, material is too wet, or there is too much nitrogen in the pile. To remedy the odor, try one of the following:

- Turn the pile more frequently.
- Add dry material such as leaves, straw, or sawdust.
- Add more carbon to the pile such as dead leaves, newspaper, etc.

My pile isn't decomposing.

If your pile isn't decomposing, it is due to lack of oxygen or nitrogen, or because the pile is too small. Freezing weather will slow or stop the decomposition rate. To increase decomposition, try the following:

- Turn the pile more frequently to add oxygen.
- Add a nitrogen source such as grass clippings, urea, bloodmeal, or coffee grounds.
- Increase the size of the pile by adding more materials. A compost pile should be a minimum of 3 ft. x 3 ft. x 3ft.

If you have additional questions, [e-mail](#) the District.

Building or Purchasing a Compost Bin

A compost bin is not required; however, a bin holds in moisture and heat, speeding up the decomposition process (and it looks more attractive in the yard). Each year, the District sponsors a compost bin sale. The 2010 sale will be held May 8th at two Hamilton County, Ohio locations. [Click here](#) for more information.

Building your own bin is easy and inexpensive.

Wire Bin

All you need is a length of woven galvanized wire (14-gauge wire) or snow fence.

To determine the length needed, multiply the diameter of the bin desired by 3.2. The ideal diameter is three to five feet. Fasten the ends of the woven wire with four small chain snaps or plastic zip ties to make a circle.



Snow Fence Bin

To build this bin, you need the appropriate length of prefabricated fencing. Fasten 2 x 4s as corner posts to the bottom to form a square.

Block or Brick Bin

Compost bins can be made with bricks, cement, or blocks. Lay the blocks without mortar, leaving spaces between each block to allow aeration. Stack them to form three sides of a square container.

Wooden Bins

A wooden bin can be constructed with a removable front or side so materials can be easily turned. Old wood pallets can also be used for construction.



Compost bins can be purchased at the following local stores:

Park + Vine sells the Covered Bridge Organic Wishing Well Composter, the SoilSaver Classic, the Gusanito Worm Bin Farm 3 Tray Garden Composter, the Happy Farmer Kitchen Composter, and the Urban Compost Tumbler.

Park + Vine
1109 Vine Street, Cincinnati, OH 45202
(513) 721-7275
www.parkandvine.com

Sam's Club

5375 North Bend Road, 45247, 661-0800

Worm's Way sells the Garden Gourmet and Enviro-Cycle composters.

Worm's Way
1360 Donaldson Highway, Erlanger, KY 41018
www.wormsway.com

Integra Contracting, Renewable Resources Division builds custom three bin turning units for composting. Robert Waddell, (513) 379-9069
integracontractingrrd@fuse.net

Uses of Compost

There are a variety of uses for finished compost. Compost can be used as a mulch and a soil amendment.

Benefits of mulching with compost:

- Reduces moisture loss
- Controls weeds
- Maintains soil temperatures
- Reduces soil erosion on slopes
- Beautifies planting area
- Adds micronutrients
- Reduces plants need for water

Benefits of incorporating compost into the soil:

- Loosens heavy clay soils
- Aerates the rooting area
- Improves soil's capacity to hold water and nutrients
- Attracts earthworms and other microbes that benefit gardens
- Provides valuable nutrients for plant growth