

Everything you ever wanted to know about composting but were afraid to ask...

The ABC's of Composting

Composting. It's nature's way of recycling. The controlled decomposition of organic materials, such as leaves, twigs, grass clippings and vegetable food waste is a simple way to add nutrients to your soil and restore its vitality. It's also a free, easy way to benefit you and your community.



Consider the many benefits of composting:

- Provides an alternative for those piles of raked leaves, since many communities now ban them from landfills
- Eliminates air pollution caused by burning leaves and other yard wastes
- Recycles nutrients by returning them to the soil

Getting Started

Get a compost bin. You can find one at hardware stores or online for less than \$100 or make your own with plastic, wire or wooden pallets. The bin should be about 3 feet long, 3 feet wide and 3 feet high.

Gather brown materials, such as DRY leaves, pruned branches or shredded paper, such as newspapers or cardboard; hay and straw; crushed egg shells; coffee grounds, tea bags, loose leaf tea; and wood ashes and sawdust (use sparingly).

Green materials are also necessary and include freshly cut grass or fruit and vegetable scraps, manure, plants and plant cuttings.

Put bin in an area with filtered sunlight and lots of shade. Add 6 inches of brown material and add water. Add 2 inches of green material, and scatter a thin layer of soil on top. Add more water. Repeat this process until the bin is full. The last layer should consist of brown material.

Every seven to 10 days, turn and mix the pile, and add water so that the material is like a moist sponge. If the pile feels warm, composting is taking place. Temperatures inside can reach 140 degrees as biochemical reactions occur.

As the pile shrinks over time, add more material. Within three or four months, the pile will consist of dark, crumbly compost that can be used as soil in your yard or garden.

Never add animal-based leftovers, such as fat trimmings, meat, cheese or milk, which will ferment and attract rodents.

Water is the key to successful composting. A compost pile should be kept damp, but not soggy, especially during dry spells. It will take six months to a year before the compost is ready for use.