



Starting to Compost?

Complete Compost Guide

DECIDE ON A COMPOST BIN AND LOCATION.

Wondering what sort of compost bin or pile to start. You should first determine how much organic waste you have, how much effort you are willing to put into maintaining the pile, how quickly you want a finished product, and whether you want to build or buy a bin.

Location! Location! Location!

Inside: You can conveniently store kitchen waste under the sink in a small, covered container. Be sure to empty it into your outside compost bin frequently to reduce smells inside your house.

Outside: Place your compost bin in a sunny area with good drainage. Make sure that the location is convenient and accessible year round.



Let's get to **half.** GetToHalf.com



THE RECIPE FOR SUCCESSFUL COMPOST.

The five essential elements for successful composting are: food, water, oxygen, surface area, and volume.

1. **Food:** It is important to maintain a suitable carbon-to-nitrogen ratio in the pile, or brown-to-green wastes. A good mixture of material consists of 50% brown and 50% green materials (by weight, not volume).

Put in:

From the house:

fruit and vegetable matter (green)
coffee grounds and filters (green)
tea leaves and bags (green)
rice, oats, and other grains (brown)
dried corn stalks (brown)
pasta (brown)
peanut shells (brown)
bread and other baked goods (brown)
egg shells (neutral, but a good source of calcium)
paper including egg cartons, paper towels,
toilet paper rolls and cereal boxes (neutral)

Keep out:

From the house:

all meat, including chicken
fish and shellfish
bones
fat, grease, and oils
all dairy products

Put in:

From the yard:

fresh grass clippings (green)
dry leaves (brown)
dried and untreated grass clippings (brown)
twigs, small branches, and sawdust (brown)
non-diseased plants (brown)

Keep out:

From the yard:

weeds that have gone to seed
diseased plants
dog and cat waste
plants previously sprayed with
non-degradable pesticides

2. **Water:** Keep the compost moist. When you touch it, it should feel damp, but when you squeeze it no liquid should come out.

Tip: Green material has high moisture content so when you are adding greens you are adding water.

3. **Oxygen:** For composting to take place, oxygen must get to the bottom and centre of the pile. Turn the compost by moving material from the outside to the centre, and from the bottom to the top and vice-versa.

Tip: Turn the pile as food wastes are added. This will help the material to compost more quickly and reduce fruit flies.

4. **Surface Area:** More surface area contributes to faster decomposition.

Tip: Cutting up materials, especially hard items like cabbage and watermelon rinds, before adding them to your bin will increase the surface area.

5. **Volume:** The pile should be large enough to hold the heat in, but small enough to let air into the centre

Tip: For home composting it is recommended that the pile or bin should be no smaller than 3' x 3' x 3' and no larger than 5' x 5' x 5'.



Let's get to half. GetToHalf.com



IT'S TIME TO ADD THE FIRST MATERIALS

Don't worry if you do not have a lot of materials in the beginning. Although a compost pile needs a certain amount of bulk to get working, you'll soon be adding lots of material to the pile.

Step 1: Turn the soil in the location where the compost bin will be placed.

Step 2: Cover the ground with a layer of small branches and then place the compost bin on top of the branches.

Step 3: Build your compost pile. Start by layering brown (e.g., yard material) and green (e.g., kitchen scraps) materials. Begin with a layer of browns, then add

a layer of greens, finish by covering with a layer of browns ensuring that the materials are fairly evenly balanced by weight. As you add to the pile throughout the season, continue alternating layers of browns and greens, always finishing with a layer of browns on top.

Step 4: Sprinkle with water (if necessary).

Step 5: Add a couple of shovels of soil, and mix everything together.

Tip: If available, add some finished compost, garden soil, or a compost starter to the pile. This helps speed up the start of the composting process.

Maintaining Your Compost Bin

- Collect kitchen scraps and add them to your compost pile.
- Do not leave kitchen scraps on the top of your compost pile. Each time you add green materials, cover with a layer of brown materials.

Tip: Keep a bag of leaves or shredded paper near your bin and throw in a few handfuls each time to cover the greens.

- Make sure the compost pile has enough moisture. If it is too dry, add water; or too wet, add brown material.
- Keep the pile aerated. To add air to the pile, turn the material over.

To sum it up - your job is to add the material, turn the pile occasionally, and keep the pile damp.

Trouble Shooting – Common Problems and Solutions

Occasionally, a compost pile's performance is less than optimal.

If your pile is:

- Too wet - turn, add dry materials, and cover
- Too dry - turn, add water, and mix thoroughly
- Too warm to the touch - turn and add green material
- Emitting strong odours - turn the pile and add brown materials
- Not heating up - if the pile is damp and sweet smelling but not heating, it may need nitrogen. Add grass clippings, table scraps or a small amount of organic fertilizer.
- Attracting pests - make sure you have not put meat, dairy, or fat products into your compost bin. Keep the pile covered, well aerated, and turn food scraps into the pile.

USING YOUR FINISHED COMPOST MATERIAL

The composting process can take from two months to two years, depending on the materials used and the effort involved.

Compost is ready to use when it looks dark and crumbly and none of the original materials (food scraps) are visible.

Tip: A simple way to test if compost is finished is to seal a small sample in a plastic bag for 24 to 48 hours. If no strong odours are released when you open the bag, the compost is done.

Compost can be used around the home for fertilizing flower beds, vegetable gardens, adding with soil on newly seeded lawns, or as mulch around plants and established lawns. By using compost, you can improve the soil and reduce your use of fertilizer and water. Compost will make your grass healthier. You can also use it indoors on your potted plants. Or you can always give compost to a gardener.

SOURCES FOR COMPOST BINS

For plans to build your own compost bin call **MMSB at 753-0948 or toll-free at 1-800-901-6672** or visit **www.mmsb.nl.ca**

To purchase a compost bin visit your local hardware or gardening store.



Let's get to half. GetToHalf.com

