

Outdoor Composting

What is it?

Compost is a soil-like substance containing broken down materials originating from kitchen food scraps, grass clippings, leaves, shredded paper, yard debris and other plant-based organic materials. It contains many nutrients, which become available as it breaks down further in the garden or lawn, and also helps add structure to the soil in the form of pore spaces for air and water, and large soil particles to which nutrients can cling. It takes anywhere from 30 days to 3 or more months to make, and can be housed in a variety of bins or piles based on your needs and space.

Why do it?

Composting helps divert waste from landfills, conserving space for items which are not biodegradable or are toxic to our environment. Less trash going into landfills delays the need to expand or build new landfills. Making compost transforms your kitchen and yard waste (and even some trash) into a valuable soil building and garden improving material, and it's free! As soil is lost over time to erosion or removal, adding compost helps regenerate the soil in your yard.



How to get started

- 1) Find a location in your yard that is convenient to take your waste to, is inconspicuous (if neighbors are a consideration), and is away from the bases of trees. A sunny spot will get the compost hotter, helping the waste to decompose faster.
- 2) Build or purchase a bin or make windrows.
 - A dark plastic bin keeps the pile out of sight and increases temperature, but needs to be watered more often.
 - A 2 or 3 bin open system allows you to add to one compartment while the others are left to decompose completely.
 - Open heaps, hog wire rolls, or windrows are simple and efficient methods if you have the space and don't mind the view.
- 3) Keep a pile of dry organic matter next to your bin so when you add kitchen scraps, you can cover the scraps with leaves to prevent odors and provide a healthy balance of dry and fresh materials.
- 4) Find a container to transport your food waste from the kitchen to the compost.



windrow



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Key Factors to Consider

- If you have neighbors nearby, consider their preferences when choosing location and bin material and aesthetic (also check with your homeowners' association if you have one).
- Compost bins can be made from several different materials or be purchased; there is a style for every budget.
- Size should reflect the volume of yard waste you generate seasonally. If you have several large trees, you will need a larger one to collect all the leaves; if you have a small yard with few plantings, you will be able to have a smaller bin primarily for kitchen waste and the dry material needed to balance it.
- Troubleshooting: if your compost pile is too wet, or not aging quickly, you could have an imbalance of fresh materials (kitchen scraps, grass clippings) to dry materials (leaves, sawdust, paper). It is a good rule of thumb to have 3 times as much dry material as fresh material. One easy way to do that is to add 3 times as much dry material when you add kitchen scraps to the pile.
- If you get a lot of leaves in your yard, consider piling them up for a year to make "leaf mold," a special type of compost that can be used for mulch or as a soil amendment.

Local Resources

- Hamilton County Recycling and Solid Waste District: hamiltoncountyclecyles.org
- The Master Composter class series is offered at the CGC in the spring and fall each year.

Recommended Reading

- *The Complete Compost Gardening Guide* by Barbara Pleasant and Deborah Martin
- *Van Patten's Organic Gardener's Composting* by Steve Solomon

