

# BACKYARD COMPOSTING: Getting Started

## Three Simple Rules:

- 1. ORGANICS:** Mix organic waste material into a pile or in a bin, alternating layers of kitchen waste and yard waste.
- 2. MOISTURE:** Sprinkle with water so the material is moist, like a well-wrung sponge.
- 3. AIR:** Every couple of weeks, turn/loosen the material or poke holes in it with a broom handle.



## Composting Makes \$ense

- ❖ Organic materials are a valuable soil resource that are lost when thrown into landfills.
- ❖ Compost on your lawn or garden reduces your need to water and your need for chemical fertilizers.
- ❖ Compost and mulch improve texture of clay and sandy soils, improve plant health, prevent erosion, and hold moisture and nutrients.
- ❖ Composting reduces by one-third the amount of garbage that a typical household sends to the landfill. (AB Environment Backyard Composting)
- ❖ Organics in a landfill are too compacted to have sufficient oxygen to compost properly. As a result, these organics produce methane as they decompose, a greenhouse gas that contributes to climate change.
- ❖ Over 60% of waste in municipal landfills is organic (kitchen, yard waste, paper, cardboard, wood). (AB Environment Backyard Composting)

## What Goes in a Composter?



Alternate layers "**GREENS**" (fresh foods/live plants), then "**BROWNS**" (dried grass/leaves/dead plants)

### GREENS (high in nitrogen):

All vegetable leftovers  
 All fruit leftovers  
 Coffee grounds & filters  
 Tea leaves & tea bags  
 Fresh tree leaves  
 Fresh grass clippings  
 Flowers  
 Live house plants  
 Breads, rice, pastas (no sauce)  
 Eggshells

YES

### BROWNS (high in carbon):

Dry leaves  
 Dry grass clippings  
 Dead dry plants  
 Corn cobs  
 Sawdust/wood chips  
 Straw/hay

YES

### SMALL AMOUNTS ONLY:

Pine needles (slow to break down)  
 Rhubarb leaves (acid toxin)

YES



### DO NOT COMPOST:

Meat, fish, bones  
 Dairy products  
 Grease, oils or fats  
 Salad dressings or sauces

Weeds with mature seeds  
 Diseased plants

Pet litter/manure  
 BBQ ashes/coal  
 Treated wood products

NO

### REASON

Attract animals

Not enough heat in a small composter to render inactive

May contain pathogens harmful to humans.  
 High sulfur. Resistant to decomposition  
 May contain harmful chemicals.

**CHOOSE A BIN:**

- an open pile or a bin both work but a bin prevents scattering
- bin can be wood or plastic; ample air holes are vital; no bottom
- any size works, but 1 cubic metre is considered optimum



**LOCATION:**

- level area, with good water drainage
- sunny or partially shaded is best
- **8" to 12" away from your buildings, fences, plants**
- bin should be sitting in loose dirt
- keep a pile/bin of "**BROWNS**" (dry grass clippings) nearby to put on top of each layer of "**GREENS**"



(too close to building)



**IS IT DONE YET?**

ORGANICS + MOISTURE + AIR = COMPOST in 2 to 3 months but best after one growing season.

The bottom of the pile will be ready first.

Lift off your bin, remove incomplete materials.

Shovel out the bottom dark brown material that looks like dirt. It will have an earthy smell.

Replace the bin and add incomplete materials.

**WHERE DO I USE THE COMPOST?**

- in your garden
- sprinkle on your lawn
- use as mulch around trees and plants



**TROUBLE SHOOTING**

Problem	Probable Cause	Solution
Bad odour	Too many "Greens" Not enough air.	Turn pile. If possible, mix in "Browns". Turn pile for several days. Top with soil.
Pile is not composting	Too dry Too many "Browns"	Moisten with water until damp. Add "Greens". Top with soil.
Flies/animals	Exposed food Wrong items	Bury food or cover with "Browns" or soil. Remove meat, fats, dairy products.
Fruit flies in kitchen container		Cover kitchen container or keep in fridge/freezer

**WHAT ABOUT WINTER?**

Continue composting kitchen waste all winter. If possible, save a pile of "Browns" to use throughout the winter. The freeze/thaw cycle will break down the size of the compost pile quickly in the spring.

**WANT TO COMPOST INDOORS?**

Vermicomposting allows composting indoors. Follow the same steps of backyard composting except add worms (1/2 lb of "red wrigglers") to your kitchen compost bin.

**MORE INFORMATION:**

- [www.compost.org](http://www.compost.org)
- [www.environment.alberta.ca](http://www.environment.alberta.ca)

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