

---

# How To Compost

## How to Compost

Decomposition is a natural process occurring around us all the time. Nature will create compost as long as you provide it with waste to break down. Ambitious composters can help this process along by monitoring the contents of their compost pile, keeping it moist, and turning it frequently. The less ambitious can simply create a pile, add plant waste to it, and let nature do the work.

**Step One:** Choose a location for your composter or pile. Look for a site that is convenient to get to, but unobtrusive. If you want to add to your pile in the winter, don't put your location too far from the house.

**Step Two:** Purchase or build a bin. A bin isn't strictly necessary, if you have the space all that's needed is a pile. The advantages of a bin are that it keeps your pile out of sight if you live in a residential area and can help keep unwanted animals out of your pile.

When choosing a bin, consider how quickly you want the compost. Turning will speed the process and a composter with multiple bins will allow you to turn the compost simply by moving it from one bin to another.

The District offers composters for sale at cost. You can also purchase bins from local retailers, or build your own. Follow the links below for instructions on constructing a bin or pen:

The University of Missouri has instructions on how to build several styles of composter from a turn-able barrel composter to a simple pen, as does Montana State University .

If you have access to wooden pallets, click [here](#) for easy to follow instructions on making a compost bin from pallets.

Step Three: Gather your materials.

While anything organic can be composted, it is recommended that home composters do not add pet waste, human waste, or any meat or dairy products to their bins. Meat and dairy will attract animals you may not want to your yard, while the pet and human waste can contain microbes that you don't want in your pile.

What you do want in your pile are vegetable and fruit remains, along with leaves, pulled weeds and grass clippings. Ideally, composters balance the amount of carbon rich and nitrogen rich materials in the pile. But you can still be a lazy composter and simply add items when you have them. It will all compost in the end.

---

A simple way to balance carbon and nitrogen is to mix food scraps and grass clippings with an equal amount of leaves.

The EPA has a list of items you should and shouldn't add to your compost pile.

Step Four: Wait.

If you're an ambitious composter, you can turn your pile periodically and monitor moisture levels, making sure to keep the pile damp. If you're a lazy composter, you needn't do anything else and in a year or two you will have usable compost.

Step Five: Use your compost

Compost can be used wherever there is soil. Add it to your garden or houseplants, or an area of your lawn that needs additional nutrients. Compost is an excellent replacement for conventional fertilizers, since it reduces run-off and aids in water retention, along with attracting beneficial organisms such as worms to your garden or lawn. Simply mix compost in with the regular soil.

Compost can also be added to contaminated soil to reduce contamination. It's also useful for reducing erosion.

Links:

The best guide to home composting that we have found on the web is made by the province of New Brunswick. It's an easy to read, comprehensive guide for those who would like more detailed information about composting.

The University of Illinois has a guide to Composting for the Homeowner .

Fascinated by the science of composting or intrigued by the potential applications? Visit the Cornell Waste Management Institute for some of the most up-to-date science on composting.

You can also become a Master Composter. Similar to the program for Master Gardeners, the Master Composter program will teach you all the ins and outs of composting, and it makes an excellent supplement to Master Gardener education. Find out more at the Vermont Master Composter website.

Vermont Composting Association has additional information about composting in Vermont.

