



BACKYARD COMPOSTING OF FOOD WASTE: IT'S AS EASY AS 1:3



Food waste is a major problem in the U.S. According to the EPA, over 20 percent of municipal trash is food waste – that’s over 38 million tons in the U.S. each year. When you throw out food, it takes up precious space in landfills and produces methane gas as it decomposes, which contributes to climate change.

You can help reduce your impact by composting your food scraps at home. Composting is a natural process that recycles organic material, such as yard debris and food scraps, into a fertile soil amendment.

Why Compost Food Waste at Home?

There are many benefits of home composting. It:

- Improves soil health, which can improve water retention and reduce the need for expensive fertilizers and pesticides.
- Saves you and/or your town money since the material is removed from waste disposal.
- Reduces the methane emissions from land-filling food waste (methane is a potent greenhouse gas).
- Eliminates the need for you to transport your food waste to a compost collection facility (if one exists).
- Provides an option when a local collection facility is not available.

Start Slow – DO NOT add meat, bones, fish, fats, and dairy to your compost pile. And do not add household animal (eg. cat/dog) poop!

These materials can harbor dangerous bacteria and other pathogens. They are also “smelly” and can attract pests.



What Can I Compost?

For best results, follow the 1:3 Rule. For every 1 part of green material that you add to your compost, top with 3 parts of brown material.

- **“Green Material”** = Food scraps, such as fruits and vegetables, nuts, eggs shells, bread crusts, coffee grounds, tea leaves, old herbs and spices, fresh cut green grass, and more.
- **“Brown Material”** = Yard waste, such as dried leaves, dried grass, and chipped wood. You can even add things like paper towels and napkins; clean sawdust or shavings; and pet fur/hair.



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Overcoming Myths About Composting

Myth: *I Don't Have Time to Compost My Food Scraps*

Fact: Composting is easy and does not take a lot of time.

1. Collect fruit and vegetable scraps in a container in your kitchen.
2. When the container is full, bring it outside and toss the scraps in the compost pile or bin.
3. Cover with a layer of "brown material".
4. Give it a quick stir with a shovel or pitchfork so that the "new" scraps get mixed in with the organic matter that is already decomposing.



Myth: *I Don't Have a Garden So I Don't Need Compost*

Fact: The finished product – "compost" – is dark brown/black and has an earthy smell. It is commonly used to enrich home garden soil and flower beds, but it can also be placed:

- Around trees, shrubs, and other plant areas where you might otherwise add mulch or rocks; or
- On problem areas on your lawn to improve the soil and help grass growth.

Myth: *My Backyard Will Smell of Rotting Food*

Fact: Compost should smell like soil – anything else indicates your compost is not properly balanced. The most likely cause is too much "green" material or not enough air is getting into the mix. Follow these steps to help reduce odors:

- Add a layer of "brown" matter (i.e., sawdust, which is particularly helpful, or dried leaves, grass, or wood chips) right after dumping food scraps into your compost.
- Mix it every week or two.
- Maintain a proper moisture level – compost that is too dry (i.e., material is dusty or gritty) decomposes more slowly, but compost that is too wet (i.e., soil that is clumpy or matted together, or leakage from the bin) has a stronger odor.

Myth: *Compost Piles Attract Bears or Other Wildlife*

Fact: Bears are attracted by the smell of food. To avoid this, minimize the "scent" of food by:

- Following the "1 Part Green" and "3 Parts Brown" rule outlined above. Sawdust is a particularly good source of brown material.
- Stir the compost weekly to prevent smell and speed up decomposition.
- If you DO have a problem with bears, avoid putting out fruit scraps, as they can have a strong sweet smell as they decompose.

Check Our Additional Guidance for How to Get Started! www.newmoa.org/solidwaste/projects/food/publications.cfm

Additional Resources:

- EPA: www.epa.gov/recycle/composting-home
- Maine DEP: www.maine.gov/dep/sustainability/compost/index.html
- Vermont DEC: <http://dec.vermont.gov/waste-management/solid/materials-mgmt/organic-materials>

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