



# A Guide to Composting at Home

REGIONAL **RECYCLING** EDUCATION



*Top: Locate compost out of your neighbors' line of sight.*

*Middle: Compost bins can be made from recycled wood pallets.*

*Bottom: Many varieties of pre-made compost bins are available for purchase.*

## WHY COMPOST AT HOME?

Food and yard waste can take up as much as 30% of your trash bin. By composting, you can greatly reduce the amount of waste you and your family send to the landfill. Compost is happening all around us all the time. By creating a compost pile in your backyard or using a compost bin in your garage, you are helping nature break down waste and turn it into rich, useful soil. Compost is a great fertilizer for any garden.

## GETTING STARTED

### Find & Design a Site

- A site that you can access, but that is out of the way of your neighbors.
- Make sure the pile isn't touching the side of your house or fence, as the compost will decay and rot the wood.
- A compost bin in your garage or basement will work too.

### Build or Buy a Structure... or Dig a Pit

- You can buy a compost bin at most local hardware or gardening stores.
- You can create your own enclosure out of wood pallets.
- Or you can dig a pit.

### Ensure Water, Aeration and Temperature Controls

- You need a site with good air circulation.
- A place with partial shade is good so the pile doesn't overheat.
- Make sure the location gets good drainage.
- Find a place close to a water source.

### Size

- Your compost pile or structure should be about three feet square.
- A pile that is too small will not get hot enough and piles that are too big don't allow air to reach the center of the pile.

## MIX, MAINTAIN & MONITOR

### Mixing

- Your compost pile will be a mix of green material (kitchen scraps, grass, weeds) and brown materials (dry leaves, straw, and paper).

**It is important to keep the mixture at a ratio of 2:1, brown: green.**

- When adding organic waste to your compost, allow space for air. Don't compress the pile too tightly.
- After you mix in kitchen waste, add leaves or straw on top. This will prevent flies from getting in and keep the moisture in the pile.

### Water

- If you have a lot of green material, you won't need as much water. Compost should be moist, but not sopping wet.
- Too much water means that your pile will be slimy and produce smells.
- Too little water means that you will kill the bacteria and your food and waste won't break down.



## VERMICOMPOSTING

As an alternative to traditional composting, you can use worms to break down the material. This is called vermicomposting.

- Vermicomposting is best done using a pre-made composting kit available online or at your local gardening or hardware store.
- Vermicomposting doesn't reach high temperatures like traditional composting so it is ideal for food waste, but not for breaking down weeds or other types of waste that may carry pathogens.
- Vermicomposting is less prone to smells so it is appropriate for an inside location like your kitchen.

## MIX, MAINTAIN & MONITOR (continued)

### Air

- Make sure that you have enough air by turning your compost pile often and completely.
- You will know that you don't have enough air if your compost is slimy and smelly.

### Temperature

- As they eat, the organisms responsible for composting produce heat.  
A successful compost pile will produce temperatures between 140-160 °F.
- A hot compost pile is an indication that the material will break down quickly.

### Preparation in the kitchen

- Only vegetable waste can be composted at home.  
**No meats, dairy, pet waste, bones or fat.**
- Chop fruit, rinds and vegetable waste into 1-2" pieces.  
This will help them break down quicker.
- To avoid flies in the compost, store your food scraps in the refrigerator or freezer before you put them in the compost pile.

## COMPOSTING IN THE MOUNTAINS

Think you can't compost because you live in the mountains? You can! Here are some tips.

- Outdoor composting is best done in the summer months to avoid frozen piles.
- Try vermicomposting inside during winter (see sidebar).

### If animals are a problem:

- Only compost fruit, vegetable and yard waste.  
**Never compost meat, dairy, or oil.**
- Sprinkle your compost with lime to reduce odor.
- Cover kitchen waste with dried leaves or grass and bury the material at least one foot underground.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION



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*The Tri-County Waste Collaborative, with representatives from Eagle, Garfield and Pitkin Counties, provides resources and information about waste reduction and recycling in the Tri-County region.*

