

Composting Has A-PEEL

An Introduction to Home Composting



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What is Compost?

Compost is a dark, crumbly and earthy-smelling material made up of decomposed organic matter such as food scraps, leaves, grass clippings and wood chips. Compost contains living organisms that require food, oxygen and water to survive.

Composting is our way of speeding up Mother Nature's decomposition process.

Passive vs. Active Composting

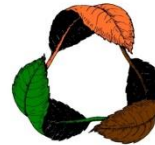
Passive composting is virtually labor-free. It requires a holding bin and takes between 8-12 months to get finished compost.

Active composting requires more frequent turning and will produce compost much quicker than passive composting.

50:50 Brown to Green Ratio

It is important when composting to maintain a balance between carbon based materials (browns) and nitrogen based materials (greens).

Brown materials include:
dried grass, autumn dried leaves, saw dust, wood chips (untreated wood), straw.



Green materials include:
fruit & vegetable scraps, coffee grounds, tea bags, eggshells.

Why Compost?

There are many benefits to composting. It is a simple and inexpensive way to dispose of and recycle food scraps and yard waste that would otherwise enter the waste stream. Compost also helps improve the health and quality of the soil that it is added to.

Composting:

- Reduces the volume of garbage
- Saves money on disposal costs
- Enriches and adds nutrients to the soil
- Improves soil structure for better root growth, increased moisture and nutrient retention
- Balances acid and alkalinity (pH) of the soil
- Suppresses disease and harmful pests
- Reduces the need for chemical fertilizers

DO Compost:

- any vegetable or fruit scraps
- egg shells
- coffee grounds and filters
- tea bags (remove staples)
- newspaper, paper towels
- leaves and grass clippings



DO NOT Compost:

- meat
- fish
- dairy products
- diseased plants
- pet waste
- cat litter
- fats and oils
- wood and charcoal ash
- grass clippings treated with herbicides
- non-organic material like plastic and metal



WHEN IN DOUBT, LEAVE IT OUT!

How to Compost

1. Choose an area about 4 x 4 x 4 feet that is not in direct sunlight and is an easily accessible spot on grass or soil. Place the compost pile away from the house.
2. Start with a 6" layer of woody stalks at the bottom of the pile. Alternate 4" layers of brown material and 2" layers of green material. Add water as needed. The pile should be as wet as a wrung sponge. Continue to add food scraps year-round by burying them in the pile and providing more brown material as needed. See troubleshooting chart below.
3. Turn or stir the pile regularly to aerate.
4. The compost is ready when it looks dark and crumbly and the starting ingredients are no longer be visible.

Troubleshooting

Problem	Solution
Compost smells	Turn the pile and add browns
Too wet	Turn the pile and add dry material
Too dry	Turn the pile and add water, then shade
Cool to the touch	Add more greens



Compost Bins

You can make your own compost bin from wood pallets, a garbage can or wire mesh. Here's how:

Wood Pallet Bin

Materials: 4 to 6 pallets, heavy-duty plastic ties.



Use 4 pallets to form the sides of the bin and fasten the pallets together with ties. You can also use another pallet for a cover and one more for a base.

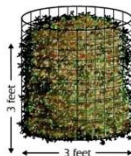
Garbage Can Bin

Materials: garbage can with cover, drill.



Drill holes all over the sides and bottom of the can. Cover the can to keep animals out of it.

Wire Mesh Bin



Materials: 14 gauge or medium weight welded wire mesh, heavy-duty plastic ties.

Form a circle with the mesh and fasten with the ties.

You can also purchase a bin from home improvement and garden centers, hardware stores or the internet at such sites as www.gardeners.com, www.amazon.com, or www.hayneedle.com



Resources

These resources will provide more detailed information on home composting.

Videos

The CT Department of Environmental Protection has produced two video programs entitled *Home Composting-Turning Your Spoils to Soil* and *Don't Trash Grass!* Download them for free at www.ct.gov/dep/composting. They can also be borrowed in VHS format from CT public libraries or can be purchased from the DEP store on-line at www.ctdeepstore.com under the [Home & Garden](#) section or call (860) 424-3555 to order.

Internet Resources

Search the Internet for "home composting" to find more resources. Some good examples are:

www.composting101.com
www.epa.gov/composting-home
www.compostinfo.com

Books and Magazines

- *Easy Composting - Environmentally Friendly Gardening* Ortho Books. Many color photographs and excellent presentation.
- *Composting to Reduce the Waste Stream - A Guide to Small Scale Food and Yard Waste Composting* Order through [Northeast Regional Agricultural Engineering Service](#), 152 Riley Robb Hall, Cooperative Extension, Ithaca, NY 14853-5701 or call (607) 255-7654.
- *The Real Dirt - The Complete Guide to Backyard, Balcony and Apartment Composting* Mark Cullen, Lorraine Johnson. Practical how-to advice, activities for children, bin plans, FAQ's, etc.

This is only a partial listing and by providing it to you, the CT Department of Energy & Environmental Protection is not recommending these resources over any others.



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