

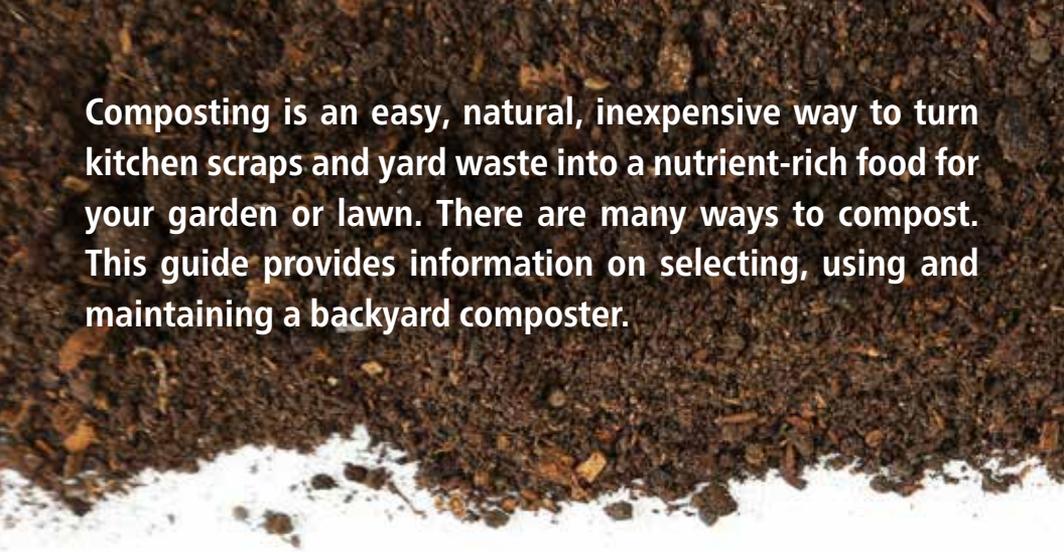
A wooden compost bin filled with dark soil and green plants. The bin is made of light-colored wood and is filled with dark, rich soil. Several green plants with small yellow flowers are growing out of the soil. A single brown egg is visible on the surface of the soil.

COMPOSTING *made easy*

A GUIDE FOR
BACKYARD
COMPOSTING



York Region



Composting is an easy, natural, inexpensive way to turn kitchen scraps and yard waste into a nutrient-rich food for your garden or lawn. There are many ways to compost. This guide provides information on selecting, using and maintaining a backyard composter.

WHAT IS COMPOSTING?

Composting is a natural process where microorganisms, worms and insects break down kitchen scraps and garden waste. It is converted to a dark, earthy material, rich in nutrients and organic matter that feed your plants and protect your gardens and lawns from disease.

WHY COMPOST?

Backyard composting is a great way to improve the quality of soil in your garden. Over time, soil becomes depleted of its nutrients and organic matter. Compost helps return these nutrients and organic matter to the soil.

WHY SHOULD I COMPOST WHEN WE HAVE THE GREEN BIN PROGRAM?

Backyard composting reduces the amount of waste going to the curb while providing a homemade compost for your garden. The green bin can be used for items that cannot go in your composter like meat, bones, pet waste and diapers; yard waste collection can be used for woody items such as branches and weeds gone to seed.



WHERE SHOULD I PLACE MY COMPOSTER?

Several factors should be considered when picking a spot to place a composter.



Easy access: pick a location that is easy to get to, even in the winter. You need enough space around the bin to allow for turning the pile and harvesting the finished compost.



Drainage: compost piles can smell if they become too wet, so good drainage is important. If your soil does not drain well, line the bottom of your bin with sticks or gravel to allow the pile to drain after a rainfall.



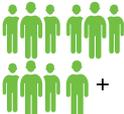
Sunlight: partial shade is best. A sunny location will thaw out the compost early in the spring but too much sun can also dry out the compost in the heat of the summer.



Wind: avoid a northern exposure to protect your composter from harsh winter winds that will cause heat loss.



TYPES OF COMPOSTERS

| Composter Style | Advantages | Suggested Capacity | Disadvantages |
|--|--|---|---|
| Open pile  | Easy to set up Easy to turn | Suitable for large groups if maintained (5+)  | No protection from wind, rain, snow, pests |
| Plastic bin (\$)  | Pest resistant Easy to set up Good ventilation Protection from rain / snow | Suitable for up to a family of five, depending on amount of organics  | Difficult to turn pile from the top Limited capacity |
| Wood/Wire composter (\$-\$)  | Inexpensive to build Can be customized to space available | Depends on sizing Larger groups possible  | Limited protection from rain/snow |
| 3 Unit composter (\$\$)  | Easy access for turning and harvesting material Extra storage space for finished compost and stockpiling leaves | Can accommodate very large groups (10+)  | Larger footprint than other models Not readily available for purchase |
| Vermicomposter/ Worm composter (\$\$\$)  | Can be used indoors all year round Good for apartments or homes with small yards | Suitable for up to two people for standard bins Larger bins suitable for up to three people  | Limited capacity Material must be chopped into small 1" pieces Needs a steady stream of food scraps |
| Rotating drum (\$\$\$)  | Pest resistant Easy to set up Rotation allows for easy mixing Protection from weather | Suitable for up to a family of four, depending on amount of organics  | Lack of drainage a problem in some models Can be heavy to turn when full Limited capacity Small opening for harvesting |

GETTING STARTED

Once you select your spot, dig a base up to six inches deep to prevent pests from burrowing under. After placing your composter, you can add your organic waste starting with the brown (high carbon) materials. Alternate layers of green (high nitrogen) and brown materials as you add to your composter (refer to Materials chart for what is green and brown). Add a thin layer of soil periodically to add more microorganisms. Make sure you add water if needed. Compost should feel as damp as a wrung out sponge.

TURN, TURN, TURN

Compost can be turned and mixed once every two to four weeks to speed up the composting process. This can be done by using a garden fork to lift and shake clumps of compost apart. Transferring the material from the bottom of the compost pile to the top helps to expose this material to fresh air. This approach is difficult with smaller compost bins. An alternative is to simply stick a garden fork or hand trowel into the compost pile and loosen the upper layers of compost so new materials can be easily mixed in.

PRODUCING A FINISHED PRODUCT

The length of time to decompose depends on the materials being composted and the conditions. Fruits, vegetables, grasses and flowers generally break down quickly. Turning the compost on a regular basis and chopping up material into smaller pieces will help speed up the composting process. On average it takes approximately one year to make compost. Nut shells, however, can take several years to break down.



HAVING TROUBLE?

1. The compost has a bad “garbage” odour

- PROBLEM** Not enough air or too wet
SOLUTION Turn the compost to aerate and/or dry it out

2. The compost is damp and sweet smelling

- PROBLEM** Lack of nitrogen
SOLUTION Mix in high nitrogen (green) materials
(Refer to Materials chart)

3. The compost has a bad “ammonia” odour

- PROBLEM** Too much nitrogen
SOLUTION Mix in high carbon (brown) materials
(Refer to Materials chart)

4. Nothing appears to be happening

- PROBLEM** Compost is dry, not enough water
SOLUTION Moisten and mix thoroughly
- PROBLEM** Compost is taking long time to break down
SOLUTION Cut food scraps and yard waste into smaller pieces
- PROBLEM** Compost pile is too small
SOLUTION Add more material
- PROBLEM** Compost is frozen
SOLUTION Decomposition will begin again in spring
- PROBLEM** Poor carbon to nitrogen ratio
SOLUTION Adjust mixture of high nitrogen (green) or high carbon (brown) material

5. Compost is too wet

- PROBLEM** Poor drainage
SOLUTION Move pile or put 6” of gravel underneath
- PROBLEM** Soaked from rainfall
SOLUTION Put lid on bin to keep out precipitation
Turn to dry out compost

6. Insects or animal pests

- PROBLEM** Meat/fish or fatty foods in composter
SOLUTION Dig in food waste and cover with yard waste or soil;
refrain from adding any more of these food materials



| MATERIALS | | Compost  | Green Bin  | Yard Waste  |
|---|---|---|---|--|
| High Nitrogen GREENS for composter | High Carbon BROWNS for composter | | | |
| Bones, meat, fish or eggs | | | ● | |
| Branches | | ● | | ● |
| Breads, pastas and cereals | | | ● | |
| Coffee grounds and filters | | ● | ● | |
| Cut flowers | | ● | ● | ● |
| Dairy products | | | ● | |
| Egg shells | | ● | ● | |
| Fat, oil and grease | | | ● | |
| Fruits & Vegetables | | ● | ● | |
| Garden clippings | | ● | | ● |
| Grass clippings | | ● | | |
| Leaves | | ● | | ● |
| Nuts and shells | | ● | ● | |
| Pet waste | | | ● | |
| Plants infected with disease | | | | ● |
| Pumpkins / jack-o-lanterns | | ● | | ● |
| Rhubarb leaves or toxic plants | | | ● | ● |
| Sauces and dressings | | | ● | |
| Straw or hay | | ● | | ● |
| Tea bags and leaves | | ● | ● | |
| Weeds (before they seed) | | ● | | ● |
| Weed seeds | | | | ● |
| Wood chips or sawdust | | ● | | ● |

For more information visit york.ca/compost or call 1-866-665-6752.