

COMPOSTING

Composting: The Basics

Composting is an easy way to reduce your household waste by up to one third. As a reward you get a high quality soil conditioner for your garden. Composting is a natural process, but it works best when it is properly managed. This fact sheet will give you the information you need to keep your compost pile healthy and productive.

Where to Put Your Bin

Finding the right spot for your composter is really a personal decision. The key is to make it convenient for you to use. The spot should be well-drained, get some sun and be fairly close to a source of water.

Getting Started

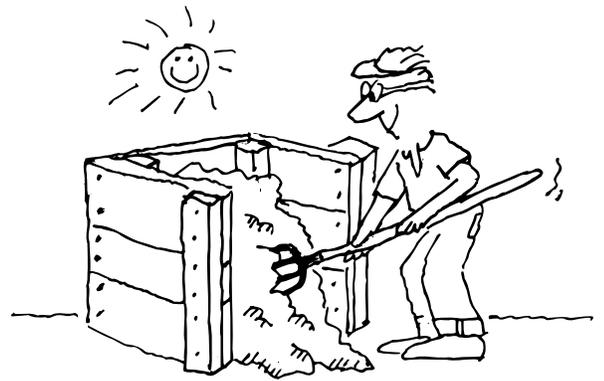
There are five basic factors to keep in mind when you compost:

I. ORGANIC MATERIAL

The process works best when you start with a good variety of kitchen and yard wastes. It may help to think of them in two categories: "greens" and "browns." Greens include vegetable peelings, fruit scraps, fresh grass clippings and young weeds. Common browns include leaves, coffee grounds, wood shavings and hay. Greens and browns combine to give you the balance of nutrients you need for composting to work well. For best results, add them in thin layers or mixed together. Chopping up what you add will also speed up the composting process. A thick layer of one material may slow things down. Do not add meat, fish or bones, fatty foods or dairy products. These can cause odours and attract pests. Dog or cat manure, diseased plants and weeds with mature seeds should also be kept out.

2. MOISTURE

Your compost pile should be about as moist as a wrung-out sponge. If you pick up a handful of compost and squeeze it, you should get a few drops of water. The decomposition process can



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stop completely if the pile becomes too dry, so add water as needed during hot dry periods. If the pile gets too wet, mix in more dry materials, aerate or leave the lid off for a few sunny days.

3. AIR

Some air circulation is needed for composting to be odour-free. Poking holes into the compost with a rake or broom handle occasionally, or turning it every few weeks, will ensure that enough air is present. Tools to simplify aeration (and save your back!) are available locally. Call Peterborough Green-Up for details.

4. MICROORGANISMS

Your composter is full of life. Bacteria, fungi, insects, worms and other organisms all play a role in breaking down the organic materials you put in. Adding a layer of garden soil to your bin periodically will make sure that these organisms are still present. Covering fresh food wastes with a thin layer of soil or leaves will also discourage unwanted pests like flies.

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(705) 743-0380
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5. TIME

The breakdown of kitchen and yard waste into compost does take time. How much time depends on how well the process is managed. Finished compost is likely to take anywhere from six months to more than a year to produce, though it can be faster if you are very attentive. If you add large, unchopped materials, they may take up to two years to break down. You can sift out larger materials when you harvest your compost, though, and put them back in the bin to finish decomposing.

Helpful Hints

Save some of your leaves in autumn to add to your pile during the rest of the year. Leaves are like soil: covering fresh food wastes with a layer of them will discourage flies and reduce odours. Shredding the leaves with the lawn mower will allow you to pack more in a bag for storage and will speed up their decomposition. Many people find that they produce enough organic material to fill two compost bins. They add fresh material to one bin while material in the other bin is left to decompose. The second bin can then be emptied, and it becomes the “active” bin. You can get additional composters through the agencies listed below.

Any Questions?

If you have questions about composting, call any of the local agencies listed at the bottom of the page.

From spring to fall, Peterborough Green-Up operates a compost demonstration site at the Ecology Park, in Beavermead Park on Ashburnham Drive in Peterborough. Drop in to watch the composting process in action, and see the beautiful results of using finished compost in gardens. Ecology Park staff will be glad to answer your composting questions as well.

Need a Composter?

The City and County of Peterborough provide composters to local residents for a nominal fee. These are available at the Household Hazardous Waste Depot on Pido Road, at Peterborough Green-Up, and at the Ecology Park off Ashburnham Drive.

Need More Compost?

Regardless of how much compost they produce at home, many gardeners are looking for even more “black gold” to add to their gardens.

Luckily, the City of Peterborough has been making excellent compost for many years, and it is available for purchase! Truckload deliveries can be ordered directly from the City Waste Management Office at (705) 742-7777 ext. 1657.

Smaller quantities can be purchased at the Ecology Park from May through October. Call Peterborough Green-Up for details.

FACT SHEETS IN THIS SERIES

- Composting: The Basics
- Preventing Odours in your Composter
- Composting Solutions / What to Compost
- Composting through the Seasons
- Pest-proofing your Compost Bin
- Using Compost in your Yard
- Vermicomposting



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