

COMPOSTING

Composting through the Seasons

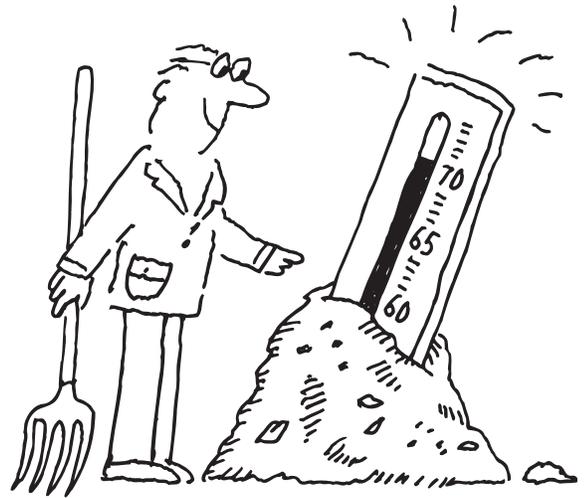
*Neither snow, nor sleet, nor rain... will stop an avid composter!
Composting can be done all year round with great success in the Peterborough area.
Your composter will naturally be more active during the growing season than in the winter,
but there is no reason to stop adding materials to your pile when the weather gets cold.*

Here are some tips on how to keep your composter productive through the seasons.

Spring

The materials you added over the winter will break down quickly after having been frozen. Once the pile thaws out in spring, the volume will drop rapidly as moisture drains away and the microorganisms become active again. To help speed up the process, mix or aerate the pile to help warmer air penetrate to the centre.

If you find finished compost at the bottom of the heap, keep this in a separate pile for adding to your garden. Springtime, before planting, is a perfect time to work finished compost into your garden. If you prefer to have a finely textured compost for seedlings or top-dressing your lawn, pass it through a 1/2" screen of hardware cloth to remove any big lumps.



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The temperature of your compost pile will go up and down with the seasons, but material will continue to break down even in the coldest weather.

Summer

Summer is when your composter can really work its best. All of the helpful organisms that transform plant scraps into rich humus can work and multiply quickly in the warmer weather.

Make sure that you add a combination of "greens" and "browns" to your composter. Greens are materials like vegetable scraps, grass clippings and green plant debris from the garden, while browns include dry leaves, straw, dry plant stalks and coffee grounds.

Add the materials in layers to be sure that you have a good blend of greens and browns. Chopping things into small pieces before you add them to the composter will help speed the process of decomposition.

With the heat of summer, a compost pile can dry out. Once a pile dries out, decomposition can stop altogether. Try to keep your compost pile evenly moist, like a wrung out sponge. You may need to add a little water now and then, during hot dry weather.

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Fall

Yard waste in the fall can overwhelm the capacity of your composter. If you have a lot of leaves, you may want to make a separate yard waste pile. Leaves will break down more quickly if you shred them by running the lawn mower over them a few times. This pile of brown material is perfect to save for layering with the kitchen scraps that you add to the composter during the coming year.

You can easily contain a leaf pile with a temporary holding bin made of chicken wire or hardware cloth.

Fall is a good time to empty your bin and spread the finished or nearly finished compost onto the garden. This will clear out more space to hold the increased volume of kitchen wastes produced during the winter while decomposition slows or stops.

You can purchase a second composter from the City/County waste departments through Peterborough Green-Up, the Ecology Park on Ashburnham Drive, or the Household Hazardous Waste Depot on Pido Road. An extra composter or two can help to contain the extra plant wastes produced in fall.

City residents can also put out excess yard waste at curbside for the Green Waste pickup from spring through fall. This material is used to produce high quality leaf compost that can be purchased directly from the City of Peterborough (by the truckload) or from Peterborough Green-Up's Ecology Park (smaller quantities).

Winter

The composting process slows down or stops during our cold Ontario winters. There is no reason to stop adding to your bin, however. The freeze/thaw activity that is typical of the winter season actually helps break down the cellular structure of the materials. In spring, the pile will quickly become active and the whole cycle will begin again.

As winter starts, you may want to insulate your compost pile with a layer of leaves or straw around the sides and on top to hold heat inside and keep the pile active for a longer period of time. Avoid aerating your pile once the weather is very cold in late fall. Turning or aerating at this time will allow heat to escape, slowing down the process more quickly than necessary.

If it's difficult to reach your composter during winter's ice and snow, try storing kitchen scraps temporarily in your freezer, to reduce the number of trips you need to make to the composter in poor weather. You might also consider moving the composter closer to the house in late fall, so winter access is easier.

Another option for winter composting is a vermicomposter, or indoor composter using red wiggler worms. While they will require more care and attention than an outdoor composter, they can be a good addition to a home composting system – producing high quality castings which are an excellent soil amendment. Ask for a copy of our Vermicomposting factsheet or call Peterborough Green-Up for details on upcoming workshops.

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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