



COMPOSTING: GETTING STARTED

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 for at least half the day, and be fairly close to a source of water. Also, be mindful of neighbours when locating your composter.

Getting Started

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

1. 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, coffee grounds, and young weeds. Common browns include leaves, 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 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 by turning contents, or leave the lid off for a few sunny days.

3. AIR

Some air circulation is needed for composting to be odour-free. Occasionally poking holes into the compost with a rake or broom handle, 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 GreenUP for details.

Did you know? The smaller the pieces of compost are, the faster they will compost! Increasing surface area of the pieces allow for more bugs and microorganisms to do their work, meaning you'll have compost faster.

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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. Periodically adding a layer of garden soil to your bin will make sure that these organisms are still present. Covering freshly added food wastes with a thin layer of soil or leaves will also discourage unwanted pests, like flies.

5. TIME

It takes time for kitchen and yard waste to break down into compost. 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. Though, you can sift out larger materials when you harvest your compost, and place 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 households 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 GreenUP, City of Peterborough, and County of Peterborough.

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 the City and County offices, and at the GreenUP Store in downtown Peterborough.

Need More Compost?

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

Small quantities can be purchased at GreenUP Ecology Park from May through October. Call GreenUP for details 705-745-3238.



WHAT TO COMPOST

Do Compost!

KITCHEN SCRAPS

- 👍 Fruit and vegetable scraps
- 👍 Dry bread
- 👍 Eggshells (crushed)
- 👍 Rice and grains
- 👍 Coffee grounds and filters
- 👍 Tea bags and leaves

YARD WASTE

- 👍 Leaves
- 👍 Grass clippings
- 👍 Plant trimmings
- 👍 Hay
- 👍 Sawdust (untreated wood)
- 👍 Weeds (not in seed)

HOUSEKEEPING WASTE

- 👍 Ashes from untreated wood (small quantities only)
- 👍 Hair
- 👍 Feathers
- 👍 Natural rope
- 👍 Cotton rags (solvent-free)
- 👍 Shredded unbleached paper

Don't Compost!

- 👎 Meat, fish, or bones
- 👎 Dairy products
- 👎 Oils
- 👎 Liquids (soap, juice, etc.)
- 👎 Plants treated with pesticides
- 👎 Invasive weeds such as quackgrass
- 👎 Weeds in seed
- 👎 Diseased plants
- 👎 Treated wood ash or sawdust
- 👎 Barbecue ash or charcoal
- 👎 Vacuum cleaner contents
- 👎 Dryer lint
- 👎 Pet waste

COMPOSTING SOLUTIONS

PROBLEM	Cause	Solutions
Ammonia smell	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Too much nitrogen 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mix in "browns" such as dry leaves • Turn pile and top with soil
Rotten egg smell	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not enough air 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turn or aerate pile regularly • Add dry materials in layers to help circulate air
Pile is damp; middle is not hot	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pile is too small 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collect more compostable material; mix into existing pile
Nothing is happening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of nitrogen • Material size too large • Pile may be too dry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add nitrogen-rich "greens" such as grass clippings and veggie scraps • Cut up kitchen wastes more finely • Add moisture and turn pile
Insect or animal pests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Odour is attracting pests • Wrong materials added 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cover pile with leaves, straw, or soil after adding food waste • Don't compost meat, fish, bones, dairy or oils

