

Composting 101

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Composting is not only a great way to minimize the waste you are producing, but it will also help your garden flourish! For many people composting is a scary proposition - it is a lot of work and tends to smell bad. I am here to say, however, that when done properly, composting does NOT have an odor and it also is not nearly as difficult as some people insinuate. Since we are just starting our composting adventure we will keep it fairly simple.

Here are some of the foods we want to avoid as they will make your compost give off an odor:

- meats
- dairy products
- most cooked items

Compost should be a ratio 75% brown material (dry; this is the carbon rich material) to 25% green material (wet; this is nitrogen rich material).

But I don't have a bin or Tumbler?!

No worries, you don't need one! You'll want to find a sunny place in your yard to get your pile started as that will help keep the temperature up. The size of your compost pile is up to you, but 3x5 feet is a good place to start. Outline your compost area with stakes, about one foot apart (Fallen branches work great for this), then weave cardboard between the stakes to create a wall. If you have palm trees, palm leaves work great in place of cardboard as well! Lay down a layer of either 'green' or 'brown' material, and your compost pile is started! Keep your compost pile covered with cardboard and weigh it down with stones or logs. If you don't have a yard or too much space, you can use a large bucket to start your compost pile.



At left, a paintbucket available at your local hardware store can serve as a Compost container.

Fun Fact

If you have chickens, they will turn your compost for you as they pick through and find goodies to eat.



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Composting 101 Continued



Not only will compost add organic matter and nutrients to your soil and help your plants thrive, it will also improve the work-ability of your soil and aid in retaining moisture.

Add compost to your garden in the spring. Lay about 3-4 inches deep of soil to your garden and till it into your already existing topsoil. Be careful not to form mounds of compost around the base of your plants.



Above, the beginnings of composting - Egg shells, garden clippings, shredded cardboard, and paper towels.

Fun Fact

Some people use the heat from compost to heat their homes and water!

Fun Fact

Depending on how hands on you are with your compost, it should take about 6 months to a year to become usable soil. The more you turn your compost, the faster it will break down and maintain the high temperature necessary for microbial decomposition. (Ideally, your compost will maintain an internal temperature of around 120 degrees F). The most efficient pile will also be between 3 and 5 cubic feet.

