

COMPOSTING 101



## **BEFORE YOU BEGIN**

You need to select a location for your bin. You will want a level area with good water drainage, a partially shaded spot is best. Keep your bin 8" to 12" away from walls, fences, bushes, plants, and openings to your home.

Before you place your bin on the ground, loosen the soil so it is sitting in dirt. Once your bin is in place, put a 4" to 6" layer of dead plants, twigs, or small branches on the bottom.

## **COMPOSTING 101**

Compost is called The Gardener's Gold because it is an invaluable partner in keeping the soil healthy. In organic gardening making compost a part of the gardener's To-Do list every growing season. If you are thinking of using compost that you made yourself instead of buying it from your favorite garden store, here are seven simple things to remember before you start making compost.

### **#1 – WHAT COMPOST IS NOT**

Compost is a wonderful recycling facility right at your home. Food scraps need not go to the landfill anymore but you can use it in your garden as organic soil improver. Your soil will love you for it. But for all its wonderful benefits compost isn't meant to be used as fertilizer. What compost does well though is help improve soil structure, prevent the growth of weeds and regulate moisture in the soil.

Most importantly, compost teems with microbial life – good microorganisms that keep the soil healthy and make nutrients readily available to plant.

### **#2 – WHAT TO CONSIDER BEFORE MAKING COMPOST**

Where you will place your compost bin or compost pile and how large your compost heap will depend on many things:

- The amount of space you have in your garden for composting.
- The kind of materials you will be using to make compost.
- How you will use compost and how much.
- The time and effort you will spend making compost.
- How you will keep your compost pile spic and span.

Decide on these things first before you start making compost so you will not face a bigger problem down the line. You may find one day that you have made way too big a compost bin when you only have a small source of organic material to build on.

### **#3 WHAT HAPPENS WHEN MAKING COMPOST**

Making compost is like fermenting beer: you need bacteria, air moisture and warmth so the magic – the breakdown of compost ingredients – can happen.

Keep in mind the following when you start making your compost:

- Microbes are responsible for digesting or decomposing compost ingredients like kitchen scraps, grass clippings, twigs, and other materials that you are using.
- When the compost pile starts to heat up, that is when the microbes are hard at work, breaking down organic materials.
- The compost heap can get as hot as 76 degrees Celsius.
- When the compost pile cools down, it may mean two things: (1) composting is complete or (2) anaerobic organisms have taken over your compost pile....which means you need to mix the pile to keep oxygen circulating enough to encourage aerobic microbes to start working again.
- Compost starts heating up two days after you have started your pile.
- Turn your compost pile every 2 or 3 days to let air circulate and speed up the decomposition of organic materials. Alternatively, you can wedge a PVC or steel pipe riddled with holes in the center of the compost so air can get through the heap.
- Cover the compost heap to protect it from rain. Too much water ferments the decomposing materials, which can stink to high heavens if you are not careful.
- A smaller compost heap is easier to manage, neater and will decompose much more quickly than a larger pile. Composting materials all at one will also help speed up composting time.



#### **#4 – WHAT GOES INTO MAKING COMPOST?**

Anything that once lived is potential compost material. They say “potential” because there are some materials that you can’t use, for simple health and practical reasons.

The best compost is a mixture of “green” and “brown” materials.

“Greens” are young, sappy materials that rot quickly and are high in nitrogen, like:

- Grass clippings
- Poultry manure
- Young weeds and plants
- Fruit and vegetable scraps
- Fish meal
- Coffee grounds
- Alfalfa meal
- Tea bags and tea leaves
- Cut flowers
- Soybean meal
- Bedding from herbivorous pets

“Browns” are organic materials made from tougher materials, have usually dried, and are high in carbon, like:

- Fall leaves
- Spoiled hay / old straw
- Wood chips
- Twigs
- Sawdust
- Cardboard
- Egg cartons
- Shredded newsprint and office paper
- Shredded tree bark
- Paper bags and paper towels

Experts suggest a 30:1 ratio of carbon to nitrogen organic materials when making compost.

#### **#5 – WHAT NOT TO COMPOST**

There are materials that are not suitable to make compost.

- One, because they simply do not decompose and will still be there when the rest of the composted material is ready. These materials include plastic, Styrofoam, glass or metal.
- Two, they may spread disease and harmful pathogens like dog feces, used cat litter, and disposable diapers.

- Three, because they encourage unwanted visitors like rodents to rummage in your compost because they are attracted to the compost's nasty smell. Things like animal bones, fat, meat and fish scraps, greasy items, and other dairy products fall in this category.

#### **#6 – COMPOST IS READY WHEN...**

It has turned into a dark soil and you can't recognize the original ingredients anymore. (Although sometimes, you will see the odd bark, twig or egg shell in it)

If you start making compost in late spring or early summer, the heat helps quicken composting time to as little as 12 weeks. In the fall, if you are composting a large pile, your composting materials are mostly slow-rotting or you are not mixing the compost heap often, compost can take up to a year – sometimes even two years – to be ready.

Most experienced gardeners and commercial growers have discovered though the secret of using compost activators – the professional type with real biology specifically designed for composting. Some call them compost starters but the principle is the same: They add specially selected microbial species to the compost pile so that these beneficial microorganisms can start working on making compost immediately.

#### **#7 – HOW TO USE COMPOST**

It is considered as medium – fertility soil improver, compost is used as mulch in spring or summers to regulate moisture and prevent evaporation so plants do not starve during a drought. How much compost you use depends on the soil's fertility and structure.

Experienced gardeners spread about 2 to 4 inches of compost on their garden beds or incorporate it 8 inches into the topsoil every year, some even twice a year. In the winter the half – composted material will have decomposed fully and would have added the much needed soil amendments in time for spring sowing.

Making compost is not difficult at all, and is well worth the effort because gardening is one endeavor where you can literally see the fruits of your labor.



## TYPES OF BINS YOU CAN USE FOR COMPOSTING



Plastic Stationary Bin



Tumbling or Rotating Bins



Wire Bin



Trash Can Bin



Block or Brick or Stone Bin



Wood Pallet Bin



Two- or Three-Bay Wood Bin



## COMPOSTING 101 QUIZ

Please circle True or False.

1. Compost starts heating up two days after you have started your pile. T / F
2. The compost heap can get as hot as 80 degrees Celsius. T / F
3. Experienced gardeners spread about 8 to 10 inches of compost on their garden beds. T / F
4. Compost is ready when it has turned into a dark soil and you can't recognize the original ingredients anymore. T / F
5. Compost is called The Gardener's Gold. T / F
6. Once your bin is in place, put a 4" to 6" layer of dead plants, twigs, or small branches under the bin. T / F
7. The best compost is a mixture of "red" and "brown" materials. T / F
8. Turn your compost pile every 2 or 3 days to let air circulate and speed up the decomposition of organic materials. T / F
9. A smaller compost heap is easier to manage, neater and will decompose much more quickly than a larger pile. T / F
10. How much compost you use depends on the soil's fertility and structure. T / F



## COMPOSTING 101 ANSWERS

1. True
2. False – 76 Degrees Celsius
3. False – Spread about 2 to 4
4. True
5. True
6. False – on the bottom
7. False – Green and Brown materials
8. True
9. True
10. True

Source

<http://agverra.com/blog/making-compost/>

[http://www.napi.ca/composting/6types\\_of\\_compost\\_bins.htm](http://www.napi.ca/composting/6types_of_compost_bins.htm)