



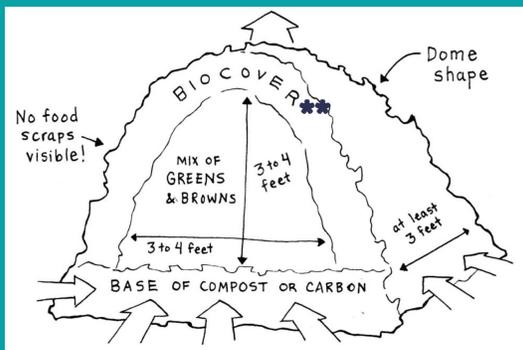
OUTDOOR COMPOSTING

Composting at home is a controlled way of recycling organic materials, such as food scraps (fruits and vegetables) and yard waste trimmings (leaves and grass) into a dark, earthy-smelling soil conditioner called compost.

Compost fortifies soil, holds water and returns valuable nutrients to the Earth. Composting lowers greenhouse gas emissions and reduces the need for synthetic fertilizers.

BACKYARD COMPOST PILE

Building your pile



Build your pile directly on the ground*, with food scraps buried in the middle

*not on concrete, asphalt, or chemically treated grass

** biocover is a thick layer of compost or carbon-rich material, like wood chips, used to cover actively composting piles

Direct soil contact will help to introduce worms and microbes to facilitate decomposition.

Put woody material on the ground under your pile to help with air flow.

OUTDOOR, ENCLOSED COMPOST BIN

Food waste can attract animals. A bin will keep pests out and help with tidiness.

Choosing a bin

There are lots of types of bins to choose from. You can make your own, or buy one.

Common examples include:



Rotating bin: The rotating feature of this bin makes turning compost convenient.



Slatted bin: This bin provides good ventilation. Just make sure to cover the top to retain moisture.



A popular choice: This bin style is one of the most popular. It has air holes for ventilation and a locking lid to retain moisture.

ELEMENTS OF COMPOST

GREENS
Fresh materials that are relatively high in nitrogen, such as raw vegetable & food scraps, green leaves, and coffee grounds.

WATER
Decomposer microbes require a layer of water on organic particles to move around and metabolize dissolved nutrients.

BROWNS
Materials that are relatively high in carbon, such as leaves, twigs, wood chips & shavings, straw, and shredded newspaper.

AIR
Just like us, decomposer microbes "breathe." Composting is an aerobic, or oxygen-requiring process.

INGREDIENTS FOR GOOD COMPOST

MAINTENANCE

- Maintain a 3 to 1 ratio of browns and greens
- Make pile at least 3'x3'x3' for efficient heating
- Aerate pile by turning it every two days
- Cut materials into small pieces before adding them to speed up the decomposition process
- Keep mixture as damp as a wrung-out sponge

LOCATION

Select a dry, shady or partly shady spot near a water source for your pile or bin.

SIZE

Ideal compost area size to provide enough food and warmth for microorganisms is at least 3'x3'x3'.

IMPORTANT NOTE

Before getting started, contact your municipality to learn what restrictions exist for yard composting.



OUTDOOR COMPOSTING

WHAT TO COMPOST

YES! ✓

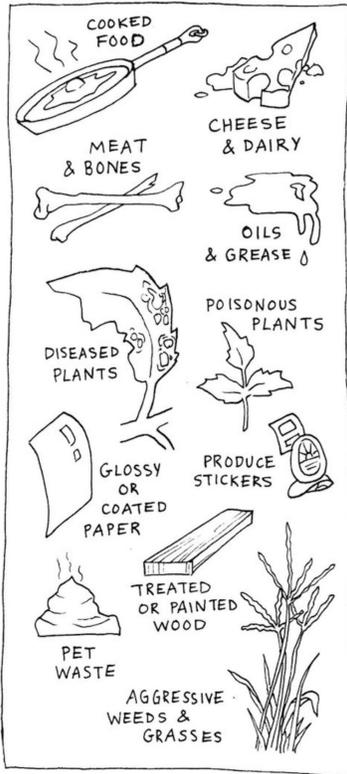
GREENS



BROWNS



NO! ✗



USING YOUR COMPOST

WHEN IS YOUR COMPOST READY?

Your compost is ready to use when:

- it is dark and crumbles in your hands
- there are no noticeable pieces of food or waste (though you can sift these items out if there are only a few)

SOIL AMENDMENT

Add compost to garden beds annually in the spring or fall.

Mix a few inches of compost into the top 6-8in of soil prior to planting.

You can also add compost to the soil when planting trees, shrubs, annuals or perennials.

MULCH

Compost makes an ideal mulch around flower beds, vegetable gardens, or around trees or shrubs in landscape beds.

Apply a 3in layer, being careful not to get close to the main stem or trunk of the plant.

POTTING SOIL

Only about 1/4-1/3 by volume of potting mix should be compost, with the rest made of perlite or vermiculite.

Compost should not be used alone as a medium for growing plants because the high nitrogen level can cause excess growth of leaves, slow root growth and inhibit flower formation.

SOURCES & FOR MORE INFORMATION

1. Illinois Food Scrap Coalition illinoiscomposts.org/composting-at-home

3. North Carolina State University Extension composting.ces.ncsu.edu/home-composting

2. Institute for Local Self-Reliance (images)
L. Bilsens Brolis, B. Platt, Community Composting Done Right: A Guide to Best Management Practices, Institute for Local Self-Reliance, 2019 (ilsr.org/composting-bmp-guide). Reprinted with permission.

4. University of Illinois Extension web.extension.illinois.edu/compost/process.cfm

5. US Environmental Protection Agency epa.gov/recycle/composting-home

What about compostable utensils, straws, bags, etc.? Leave these out - they take a LONG time to break down.

HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE?



Outdoor bin and pile composting will take about 6-12 months with proper maintenance.

COMPOST PICK UP SERVICES

Don't have the time or space to compost yourself?

Consider using a pick-up service. Local options can be found at illinoiscomposts.org. Contact the service directly for a list of acceptable items.

Or, contact your municipal government to ask about local composting programs.

INDOOR COMPOSTING

Don't have the time or space to manage a pile? Check out [these indoor options](#) for processing food scraps.