DON'T WASTE FOOD SC

PREVENT
DONATE
COMPOST

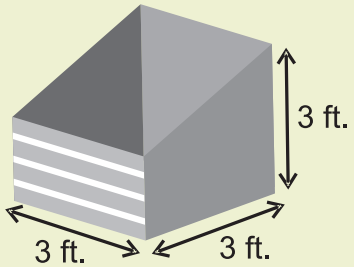
TIP SHEET 3

Compost at Home

Here's the dirt on composting. *It's simple to do. All you need to get started is a little time, a little space, a bin and a basic understanding of the composting process.*

Composting is nature's way of recycling. It is the natural decomposition of organic material (from plants and animals) such as leaves, yard trimmings and food waste (e.g., fruit and vegetable scraps). Microorganisms and insects break down this material into compost – a crumbly, dark-colored, earthy-smelling, soil-like material. Compost is a nutrient-rich product that can be used in your garden and flower beds and on your lawn.

COMPOSTING: STEP BY STEP



1 Begin with the bin.

Ideally, your compost pile should be at least 3 feet wide, 3 feet deep and 3 feet tall. Compost bins can be purchased or made at home with scrap wood and wire mesh or an old trash can.

2 Pick a location.

Pick a dry, shady spot near a water source in your backyard. It needs to be at least 2 feet away from any structures including fences. There should be enough space to add materials as well as turn and harvest your compost.

3 Follow the recipe.

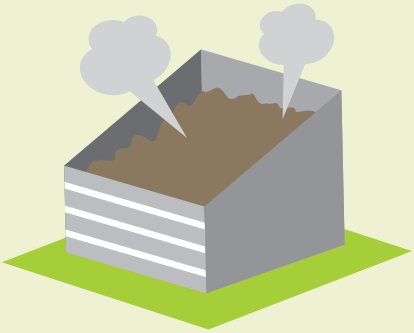
Making compost is a lot like cooking a meal – you need a recipe. The basic ingredients are 3 parts "browns" to 1 part "greens," in alternating layers. See the back for more details.

4 Add water.

Water is important. Too little moisture will inhibit the composting process. Too much moisture will cause the compost pile to smell. Here's a simple tip to follow – the compost pile should be as moist as a sponge.

5 Mix it up.

Air is essential. Use a pitchfork, shovel or roll your barrel to turn your compost pile at least once a week to inhibit odor-causing bacteria and to speed up the composting process.



6 All done!

As materials break down the pile will get warm. Don't be alarmed if there is steam. Now just wait – you could have finished compost in as little as 12 weeks. When your pile has no remnants of food and is a dark, soil-like material, it's ready!

What goes in and what stays out?

CAN BE COMPOSTED

GREENS
Fruits and Vegetables
Eggshells
Coffee Grounds and Filters
Tea Bags
Nut Shells
Fresh Grass Clippings
House Plants
Dryer and Vacuum Lint
Hair and Fur

CAN BE COMPOSTED

BROWNS
Shredded Newspaper
Cardboard
Brown Paper (e.g., napkins, paper towels)
Yard Trimmings
Dead Grass Clippings, Leaves and Twigs
Hay and Straw
Sawdust and Pencil Shavings
Wood Chips and Mulch
Cotton and Wool Rags
Fireplace Ashes

SHOULD NOT BE COMPOSTED

ITEMS TO AVOID
Black Walnut Tree Leaves or Twigs
Coal or Charcoal Ash
Dairy Products
Eggs (shells are OK)
Diseased or Insect-Ridden Plants
Fats, Grease, Lard or Oils
Meats or Bones
Fish Bones or Scraps
Pet Waste
Treated Paper Products
Plastics, Metals or Glass
Chemical Products

Remember to turn or mix your compost at least once per week.

Problems and Solutions

1. **The pile doesn't heat up.** If the pile is new, try adding more "greens" or water to your pile. If your pile is old and you've turned it a few times, it may be finished composting.
2. **It smells like ammonia.** If the pile is too wet, turn it with a shovel or pitchfork to let in air and mix it up. Add "browns" to the pile. Ammonia odors often indicate too many "greens."
3. **The pile is attracting scavengers.** Don't add food waste with oils, meats or dairy. Keep "greens" covered with a layer of "browns."

Need help?

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) offers basic information on composting in your backyard or indoors depending on the space at **www.epa.gov/recycle/composting-home**.

The Natural Resources Defense Council also provides tips for composting at **www.nrdc.org/stories/composting-way-easier-you-think**.

Many local governments also offer workshops, often with opportunities to buy compost bins at reduced prices or at cost. Check with your local recycling coordinator. Contact information is available at **www.scdhec.gov/recycle** and click on WHERE TO RECYCLE LOCALLY.

The Benefits of Backyard Composting

- Compost reduces the amount of waste a household generates.
- Compost reduces or eliminates chemical fertilizer and pesticide use.
- Compost improves soil by increasing aeration (the ability of air to circulate) and water-holding capacity (reducing your need to water) as well as helping plants absorb nutrients. Compost also helps suppress plant diseases and pests.
- Composting at home can save you money.

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www.scdhec.gov/dontwastefoodsc

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Healthy People. Healthy Communities.

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