



A HOW-TO GUIDE FOR
**BACKYARD
COMPOSTING**

WHAT IS COMPOSTING?

Composting is the process where organic material, such as kitchen and yard waste, breaks down, allowing rich nutrients to be returned to the soil. To understand why compost is important, you need to understand soil and the nutrient cycle.

Soil provides plants the nutrients that are necessary for all growing things to flourish. When plants such as fruits and vegetables are taken from the soil, those nutrients are taken, too. To make sure the soil has enough nutrients to feed everything growing in it, we can turn organic material like peels, cores, and many other things into nutrient-rich compost because these materials are rich in nitrogen, carbon, and other nutrients.

Compost is a valuable soil addition and can be created with very little effort. In order to successfully compost, you simply need to create the conditions for composting to happen. The only materials needed to create compost are air, water, and natural materials, such as yard and kitchen waste.

Compost is ready to use when all of the materials are broken down. The finished product is a dark, earthy substance that looks, feels, and smells like dense, rich soil. Depending on how well your compost is maintained, the process can take from six months to two years. Whether you have large flower and vegetable gardens or a small lawn, composting can be an effective way to help keep your surroundings beautiful.



WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF COMPOSTING?

Helping Your Garden Grow

By adding compost to your vegetable or flower gardens, shrubs, and lawn, you are supplying rich nutrients and conditioning the soil, at no cost.

Reducing Waste

30% of the waste produced in your home can be composted in your backyard. Composting will reduce the need for curbside collection, hauling, and processing by your municipality.

Environmental Responsibility

Since compost is a natural and healthy fertilizer, composting helps you to reduce your reliance on chemical fertilizers.



HOW DO I COMPOST?

Helping your garden grow



1. Choose Your Composter

While you do not need a container, it can help keep your compost tidy and manageable. A composter will prevent your organic material from blowing around and keep it from getting too wet from rain, which can cause it to smell. You can purchase a ready-made container, or find instructions online to make your own.



2. Pick a Location

Choose a spot in your backyard on bare ground with a fair amount of shade, such as under a tree or at the edge of a wooded area. This will prevent your compost from drying out in the sun. Your composter should be easy to access in all seasons.



3. Build Your Pile

A successful compost pile is made from alternating layers of browns (e.g. leaves and paper) and greens (e.g. kitchen waste and grass clippings). Start with browns and then switch between layers, ending with brown on top. Breaking large materials, such as twigs, into pieces will help them decompose more quickly.

GREENS

(wet & soft materials)

Weeds

Grass clippings

Kitchen waste

Fruit

Vegetables

Bread

Pasta

Coffee grounds

Filters

BROWNS

(dry & woody materials)

Cereal Boxes

Leaves

Straw

Hay

Ash (cooled)

Paper

Paper egg cartons

Toilet paper rolls



Never put meat, fish, bones, fat, dairy, or pet waste in your backyard compost pile. These items take a long time to decompose and can attract rodents and create odours.



4. Add Material to Your Pile

Greens add nitrogen and moisture to the pile while browns help air circulate and also add carbon. Keeping greens sandwiched between browns helps everything break down faster. Keep browns close to the pile so you can add them on top of any greens.



5. Maintain Your Pile

Your pile should always be damp but not too wet, like a squeezed sponge. If the pile is too damp, add browns to help absorb the moisture; if it's too dry, add more greens. Every two to three weeks, turn the compost using a pitchfork or shovel to help air circulate.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How long does it take to make compost?

A properly maintained heap can produce compost in as little as three months or can take as long as two years. Alternating between browns and greens and mixing the pile often will help ensure the process will not take as long.

What should I do if my compost smells bad?

The pile may smell if there are too many greens and not enough browns. To reduce smell, add more browns. Mixing the pile will also reduce odour. Meat, bones, or dairy products should not be added to your backyard compost as they will cause the pile to smell.

Can I compost in the winter?

Yes, although materials will break down at a much slower rate in the winter. Keep adding material to the pile and even if it freezes it will begin decomposing again in the spring.

Will animals be attracted to my compost?

It is rare for animals to be attracted to a properly maintained compost heap. Do not add meat, bones, dairy products (including cheese), fatty materials, or oils, as these are likely to attract animals. Ensuring that green materials are covered by browns will reduce the possibility of attracting animals to the compost pile.

Can I compost ashes?

Untreated wood or paper ashes can be composted, but they must be completely cooled. Ashes from barbeques, plywood, treated wood, or glossy paper can contain toxic material that cannot be composted.

BACKYARD COMPOSTING



WHAT'S IN

From the house:

- » **Fruit and vegetable scraps**
- » **Baked goods**
- » **Rice and other grains**
- » **Pasta**
- » **Paper towels/serviettes**
- » **Tea leaves/bags**
- » **Coffee grounds and filters**
- » **Egg shells, paper egg cartons**
- » **Shredded paper (newspaper, cereal boxes, paper packaging, etc.)**

From the yard:

- » **Leaves**
- » **Grass clippings**
- » **Weeds**
- » **Twigs (broken into small pieces)**
- » **Plants, plant trimmings (non-diseased)**



WHAT'S OUT

From the house:

- » **All meat, including chicken**
- » **Fish and shellfish**
- » **Bones**
- » **Fat, grease, oils**
- » **All dairy products, including cheese**

From the yard:

- » **Weeds that have gone to seed**
- » **Diseased plants**
- » **Large branches, roots, etc.**
- » **Dog and cat waste**
- » **Noxious weeds**

For more information about backyard composting, please contact your municipality's solid waste management department.

ABOUT DIVERT NS

Divert NS is a not-for-profit corporation that helps drive the culture of refusing to waste in Nova Scotia.

We operate two recycling programs: the Beverage Container Deposit-Refund Program and the Used Tire Management Program. We also work in partnership with business, like-minded environmental organizations, government and academia to foster stewardship, fund innovation, educate Nova Scotians, and support municipal waste programs province-wide. Divert NS is always looking for opportunities to improve our province's environment and economy.

**For more information on Nova Scotia's
solid waste management programs, contact:**



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