



# AT-HOME COMPOSTING

Composting is a process that turns organic materials like food, leaves, and yard waste into soil enrichment. Known as “black gold” to gardeners, compost replenishes nutrients in the soil, helps it retain moisture, makes the soil easy to work, and helps plants resist disease and overcome adverse conditions without pesticides or chemical fertilizers.

## Why Compost?

In addition to tremendous benefits to plantings and gardens, composting also has environmental benefits.

- According to the MassDEP, organic waste makes up nearly 25 percent of the waste stream, which translates to over 1 million tons of organic waste in Massachusetts per year. Backyard composting is a great way to divert materials from the waste stream and provide residents with an alternative to yard waste collection.
- Composting at home can help reduce methane production at landfills. Using compost in landscapes helps store carbon in the soil instead of releasing it to the atmosphere.
- Composters can reduce their trash by composting fruit peels, vegetable scraps, tea bags, coffee grounds, egg shells, paper towels, napkins, leaves, grass clippings, garden debris, and even paper bags.

## How to Use Compost

Compost benefits all plants and there are many different ways to use it.

- Add a handful of compost to each transplant hole when planting seedlings or potted plants. Spread another handful on the surface of the soil around the newly planted seedling, making sure the compost is not touching the stem or trunk of the plant.
- Spread compost as a mulch around perennials, shrubs, and other existing plantings.
- If you are planting seeds, apply one-half to three inches of compost and mix it in with the top four inches of soil in the seedbed.
- To rejuvenate lawns, screen your compost using ½” screening. Sprinkle the screened compost on the lawn about ¼” deep. Screened compost is also excellent for reseeding lawns. Sprinkle it ½” deep over the bare spots and distribute new grass seed on top.
- You can even make excellent potting soil with compost by mixing equal parts compost, sand, and loam.



## How to Compost

### Step 1: Set up and fill your bin

Once you've set up your compost bin, fill your compost bin using three parts "brown" material and one part "green" material.

- "Brown" ingredients include leaves, straw, dried grass clippings, wood chips, sawdust, pine needles, and paper products such as paper towels, napkins, bags, plates, coffee filters, tissue, and newspaper.
- "Green" materials include fresh grass clippings, weeds, fruit and vegetable scraps, coffee grounds, tea bags, eggshells, manure, and seaweed. This provides food for the compost organisms in a recipe that will not create odors.

Make sure the materials are damp as you build the pile, especially the "browns." As you build the pile, sprinkle on several shovelfuls of rich garden soil or finished compost after every 12" of fresh material.

### Step 2: Remember the leaves

Leaves are an important ingredient of a compost pile. Without them, a compost pile may become too wet and create odors. If you have leaves available, use them to start your compost heap and save the rest to add during the summer.

Compostable food scraps and grass clippings should be buried under about 6" of leaves, where they will decompose without odor. If leaves are in short supply, add plenty of paper towels, napkins, and torn up paper bags to provide the necessary carbon, and always bury your food scraps under this material.

### Step 3: Turn your pile

Most of the composting work is done by soil organisms that convert organic material to humus. They need oxygen, just as we do. Lack of oxygen will slow down the composting process and cause odors.

Turn your pile, fluff it with a hoe or turning tool, or build air passages into the pile to keep your compost pile aerobic and odor free.

### Step 4: Let nature do its work

In about three months, the material will start to turn to compost. The material at the bottom of the pile will be ready first. As more time goes by, the level of compost in the pile will rise until it is easy to access just below the surface. You will know your compost is ready to use when it looks like rich, brown soil and no longer resembles the original materials.