

Compost

NORTH COOK COUNTY SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Frequently Asked Questions

What are some of the advantages of using a compost bin?

Free standing compost heaps are fine in many situations but if you have little room or want to make good-quality compost quickly, a compost bin is the best.

Compost bins are effective in composting waste because:

- They keep in the warmth created by the decomposition process speeding up the composting process.
- The amount of water contained in the compost can be controlled more easily. Water the compost bin when the compost becomes dry, cover it when conditions are wet.
- The compost is kept moist right up to the edges which speeds up the composting process.
- Small amounts of compost will decompose much quicker in a compost bin.
- A compost bin keeps the compost enclosed, deterring wild & domestic animals from disturbing the process. Bees and wasps sometimes favor open compost heaps for nesting, in comparison to a bin.
- Keeps compost neatly enclosed, well-suited for residential areas.

What are some of the benefits of your Tumbling Composter?

Height Eliminate back strain with this hip level composter.

Upcycled Materials It is made with recycled components; including a pre-used 55 gallon black barrel and 100% recycled lumber painted with water based exterior latex paint. The composter is an upcycled food grade barrel.

Minimal Storage Size It is about 4 foot tall and only requires a 3 foot by 4 foot area. You can put it in a smaller area for storage, but you'll need that much space free from obstacles to spin the barrel and properly aerate the compost. Assembled dimensions: 36" wide by 36" deep by 46" tall.

Easy Mixing / Turning Using a rocking motion to build momentum, a compost tumbler is relatively easy to turn. The composting action will rapidly reduce the content of the barrel to less than half its starting volume.

Heat The black barrel will absorb heat all day. Holds the heat in all night.

Aeration The center tube aerates the compost pile and allows excess moisture to drain out. The steel bars inside break up the compost and fluff it up for better aeration.

Other Details:

- Holds an impressive 7.3 cubic feet of material!
- Low maintenance, nothing to clog up.
- Pest proof, fully enclosed, off-the-ground compost bin.
- 5 year manufacturer's warranty

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What and how much should I compost?

Carbon/Nitrogen Ratio

All compostable materials are either carbon or nitrogen-based. The secret to a healthy compost is simple: maintain a working balance between these two elements.

Carbon-carbon-rich matter (like branches, stems, dried leaves, peels, bits of wood, bark dust or sawdust, shredded brown paper bags, coffee filters, egg shells, straw, peat moss, small amounts of wood ash) gives compost its light, fluffy body.

Nitrogen-nitrogen or protein-rich matter (manures, food scraps, leafy materials like lawn clippings and green leaves) provides raw materials for making enzymes.

A healthy compost should have **more carbon (brown) than nitrogen (green)**. A simple rule of thumb is to use one-third green and two-thirds brown materials. This allows oxygen to penetrate and nourish the organisms that reside there. Too much nitrogen makes for a heavy, smelly, slowly decomposing mass. Good composting hygiene means covering fresh nitrogen-rich material, which can release odors if exposed to open air, with carbon-rich material, which often exudes a fresh, wonderful smell. **If in doubt add more carbon!**

What are some examples of browns (carbon) & greens (nitrogen)?

Browns: (carbon)

- Leaves (improves aeration)
- Dried Grasses
- Sawdust (untreated wood)
- Hay & straw (good bulky material)
- Paper & cardboard (i.e., cereal boxes, newspaper, paper plates and napkins in small pieces)
- Woody pruning ($\frac{1}{4}$ inch or smaller)

Greens: (nitrogen)

- Coffee grounds (include filter)
- Vegetable peelings
- Fruit peelings
- Grass Clippings (mix well)
- Fresh manure (from healthy herbivores)
- Green plant cuttings
- Young hedge trimmings
- Eggshells (best crushed)
- Tea bags

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What shouldn't I add to the compost?

There are a number of materials that you should keep out of your compost. Adding some items, like vegetable fats and dairy products will simply slow down the composting process by excluding the oxygen that helpful organisms need to do their job. If you add these materials you will still have usable compost, it will just take much longer. Adding other materials to your pile is simply dangerous because of the chance of poisoning or disease. Human or pet feces, chemically or pressure treated wood or sawdust, and meat and animal fats fall into this category and should never be added to your compost.

Do Not Add:

- Meat, bones, poultry, fish & dairy (hazardous, slow to compost, bad smell, attracts wildlife)
- Fatty food waste (will not break down, attracts wildlife)
- Human & pet feces (parasites and disease)
- Noxious weeds (caution- can spread weeds if compost isn't hot enough)
- Treated wood (chemicals)
- Diseased plants (caution- can spread diseases if compost isn't hot enough)
- Toxic chemicals (caution- materials carrying pesticides, etc. will harm or kill beneficial soil life)
- Charcoal briquettes (will not break down)

How does composting work? Simplified Explanation

Composting is an acceleration of the natural process of decay and decomposition of organic materials. The microorganisms found in soil breakdown the organic material into a nutrient rich humus. In the process the microorganisms also give off carbon dioxide and heat. These microorganisms (such as bacteria, protozoa, algae and fungi) need water and air to thrive. Maintain a healthy community by keeping your compost moist (not soaking wet), turning the compost regularly to provide oxygen and supplying the right balance of carbon and nitrogen material (see **What and how much should I compost?** & **What are some examples of browns (carbon) & greens (nitrogen)?**).



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How do I get my Tumbling Composter started?

Assemble your tumbling composter.

- Use instructions provided with your purchase.

Decided where to put your composter.

- Consider the distance to compost materials and where compost will be used when ready.
- The best position to place your composter is in full sun or at a minimum partial sun. The black barrel will absorb heat all day.
- It is about 4 foot tall and only requires a 3 foot by 4 foot area.

Gather and prepare organic materials.

- You can start adding kitchen scraps as soon as you have your composter assembled. When you toss in your first amount of kitchen then see what is in the composter and add the same amount of yard. (see **What and how much should I compost?** & **What are some examples of browns (carbon) & greens (nitrogen)?**).
- Shred or breakdown materials. General rule is to keep materials at two inch diameter or smaller.
- There are many containers (composting pails or buckets) on the market for indoor collection of composting materials.

Place materials into the tumbling composter.

- Greens
- Browns

Water your compost.

- Keep compost moist. Compost should not be soaking wet nor completely dry. Monitor.

Turn your compost.

- Flip your compost every couple days 3 or 4 times around. Always stop the composter lid up.

Finishing Touches

- When the composter is full to the same level inside as the top of the legs on the outside then stop.
- The tumbler will break up the compost pile so it does not clump and allow air to flow through the compost because the lid is up.
- Check the material every couple weeks to make sure the compost pile is not too dry.
- When the composter is finished it will have the consistency of heavy loamy soil.
- Dump the compost material into a wagon, cart or on the ground and start another batch.
- The first couple of batches will take about 5-7 weeks. Each successive batch will compost faster and you will start seeing about 4 week turn around per batch.