

# BACKYARD COMPOST HANDBOOK

A Quick & Easy Handbook for Composting at Home



# Compost-a-Peel

Composting is one of the most significant ways to reduce the amount of waste created by each of us and to create a wonderful soil amendment for your garden.

Composting can benefit your soil and plants in many ways. It increases the soil's organic matter content and its' moisture-holding capacity. Compost improves soil porosity and helps to control soil erosion. It also enhances plant and flower growth and helps plants develop a sound root structure. Use it on your lawn, in your garden, around trees or combine it with potting soil for your plants.

**Composting is the recycling of organic materials.**

**Anything that used to be a living entity,  
be it a carrot, leaves or an apple, can be recycled  
through the composting process.**

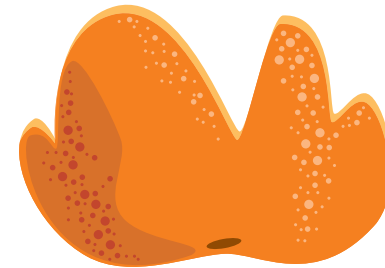
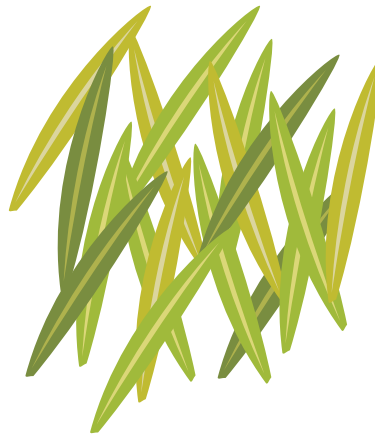
Home composting can be done with the use of either a "build your own" or commercial unit such as the Earth Machine, often available through your municipality. It's always good to give your municipal recycling department a call to find out what support materials they might be able to offer you as you begin your composting journey.



To make composting happen, you need to put a basic recipe into action. For backyard composting, the two best sources of these ingredients can be found in your kitchen and garden. The ingredients come from two categories: the “greens” and the “browns”.

### The “Greens” and the “Browns”

Common “greens” are materials like fruit and vegetable trimmings, tea leaves, coffee grounds, prunings from plants and grass clippings.



“Browns” include dried leaves, coffee filters, shredded paper and small branches.



To make things more convenient, consider keeping a container in your kitchen to collect the scraps destined for your compost bin. This will help reduce the number of trips out to your compost bin.

It’s best to completely avoid including meat, fish and bones, fats and oils, dairy products, sauces and pet waste in your compost as these will smell bad and attract rodents.

## **Small Pieces & Alternating Layers**

The composting process works best when the organic pieces are small. Chopping up a banana peel or shredding the leaves before adding them to the compost pile will do wonders to speed things up.

In filling up your bin, think of it as if you were making lasagna. Alternate your greens and browns. Adding some finished compost or soil from your garden provides a start-up crew of micro-organisms to speed up the composting process. Don't add thick layers of any one kind of organic material.

Grass layers should not be more than 6 cm deep, and layers of leaves no more than 15 cm deep (think about cutting, chopping, drying and crumbling them before putting them in your bin). If you can, let grass dry first or mix it with dry, coarse material such as leaves to prevent compacting.

## **Mix It Up & Keep It Moist**

Turn or mix the contents of your bin every couple of weeks or each time that you add new materials. This helps keep the compost well aerated and mixes up the materials.

Always make sure that you cover up your food scraps. Consider keeping a bag of leaves from the fall clean-up next to your bin for this use as the year progresses.

The composter contents should be moist, like a wrung-out sponge. If the contents are too dry, they will take too long to compost; and if they are too wet, they may begin to smell.

## **Patience Is a Virtue**

The composting process can take from two months to two years, depending on the materials used and the effort involved. To accelerate the process, the pile must be a balance between green and brown materials and be turned frequently.

Compost is ready for use when it is dark in colour, crumbly and has an "earthy" smell. You can sift the compost through a screen and put the larger chunks of recognizable materials that haven't fully "broken down" back into your bin to be further composted.

## Spread the Love

Once your compost is ready, you can spread it on your lawn, in your garden, around trees or combine it with potting soil for your plants.



For more information about Compost and Soil Health, please visit [www.compost.org](http://www.compost.org)