



The Dish on Composting at Home

Once our food scraps hit the waste basket it is out of sight, out of mind, and out of our lives, right? Not exactly, there is a pretty substantial impact from sending food waste to a municipal landfill. It all comes down to how the waste decomposes.

The types of decomposition that occur are aerobic and anaerobic. Aerobic decomposition happens when oxygen is present. This type of decomposition progresses at a rapid pace and produces carbon dioxide opposed to its less desirable cousin, methane. Methane is produced in anaerobic decomposition with the absence of oxygen, this occurs at the landfill. So, what's the big deal? Both gases contribute to the greenhouse effect, right? While this is true, methane gas holds more heat than carbon dioxide resulting in a greater impact.

If you want to reduce your ecological footprint, but don't want to cut meat out of your diet or don't have the option of biking to work, start with how you dispose of your food scraps. Below you will find the dish on composting at home.

Getting Started

1

Find a place inside your kitchen for compostable scraps, like a covered bucket or container you can store under the kitchen sink.

2

Find a location for your outside bin away from the house. Perhaps near your garden. Your bin can be a plastic tub, trash can, or simply a pile. Using a pile is helpful for allowing easy access for organisms to enter and decomposing material.

3

Layer woody garden refuse on the bottom of your bin to allow for airflow. As your bin inside fills, empty it onto your pile. You can also throw in your grass clippings and gardening refuse.

4

Be sure your pile is damp but not soaked. A fast-acting compost pile is 40 to 60 percent water. To test for this squeeze compost from various places in your pile in your hands, it should feel like a wrung-out sponge. If it is too dry turn your pile over and add water as necessary.

5

Let your pile breathe! To maintain oxygen in your compost, turn the material over with a shovel every two to three weeks. Continue to do so until the pile is thoroughly mixed-up. This action will speed-up the process and keep it from producing methane and reduce pest activity.

6

Overtime the material at the bottom of the pile will begin to look like nice, rich soil. When you don't see any recognizable scraps, the compost is ready to use in your garden or flower pots. Harvest the compost from the bottom of the pile once or twice a year. What isn't used will continue to break down and make more compost.

Do Compost



- Produce trimmings
- Coffee grounds and select tea bags
- Grass clippings
- Dead leaves
- Straw
- Saw dust
- Select garden waste
- Egg shells
- Paper towel and toilet paper rolls in moderation

Do Not Compost



- Meat or bones
- Branches or stalks from your garden
- Anything that has been treated with pesticides or chemical fertilizers
- Weed seeds and roots
- Diseased plant material
- Ashes from charcoal barbecues
- Ashes from fireplaces or wood stoves (A handful or two per pile is okay if you have acidic soil, do not use if your soil is alkaline since ashes increase alkalinity)
- Waste from pets

Benefits of Composting

- Aids in maintaining diverse organisms in the soil
- Provides nutrients for better plant growth
- Releases nutrients slowly without leaching away as synthetic fertilizers do
- Improves soil structure and provides drainage to clay soils and moisture with nutrient retention in sandy soils
- Prevents erosion

