



WHAT'S COOKIN' IN YOUR BACKYARD?

Compost is nature's way of recycling. It is the rich dark result of the breakdown of plant and organic material. The recipe for compost calls for items you probably discard every day.

It is helpful if you have the proper "pot" in order to "cook" your compost, although you can simply pile the materials on the ground. Your choice of "cooking pots" depends on how much time and money you want to spend.

If you want to build your own, a good open compost bin can be made from welded wire fencing. Ask your hardware store or building supply store for 4' x 4" x 2", 14 gauge welded wire mesh. A 10' long section will roll up to make a bin 3' across.



You can also build a holding unit using lumber. Saw the 8-foot lengths of 2 x4 pressure treated lumber into four pieces, each 4 feet long, to be used as corner posts. Place the four posts in to the ground 3 feet apart at the corners. Saw each of five foot boards into four 3-foot pieces. Allowing five boards to a side, start at the bottom and make a three-sided container. Leave 2 inches between boards to allow air to get into the pile. If you wish to decrease your composting time, build a second holding unit so that the wastes in one can mature while you add wastes to the other.

Another alternative is to use a 20 to 30 gallon soft plastic garbage can and drill 1/2" holes every 6" or so to provide air circulation. Drill a few holes in the bottom for proper drainage. Both types of bins work well as long as their design allows for *air movement* and has an open side or top so you can easily turn and remove the finished product.

BASIC INGREDIENT LIST

- Grass clippings
- Leaves

- Weeds/Garden waste
- Fruit/Vegetable trimmings
- Egg shells
- Coffee grounds/filters
- Tea Bags



GOURMET ADDITIONS

- Hay or straw
- Sawdust
- Shredded paper
- Vacuum cleaner or dryer lint
- Nitrogen fertilizer

DO NOT INCLUDE

- Meat scraps or bones
- Grease/fat
- Oil/salad dressings
- Cheese/dairy products
- Whole branches/logs
- Synthetic fibers
- Plastics/foam
- Diseased plants
- Human/pet waste

The recipe for making compost is alternating layers of ingredients so they are "cooked" together to produce the finished product.

SLOW AND EASY COMPOST COOKING

Easy compost is prepared by simply adding layers of ingredients to your bin or pile as they become available. Try to spread the layers out evenly from side to side and be sure to bury kitchen waste in the center. When the bin is full, at least 3 to 4 feet deep, allow the compost to "bake." It should heat up to the desired temperature (90 - 140 degrees F) in a few days and yield compost in 12 to 24 months.

FASTER COMPOST WITH A BIT MORE TIME AND EFFORT

A more complicated preparation involves alternating layers of organic material with fertilizer, manure or soil and watering each layer lightly as it is added. Turning the layers every few days will speed up the decaying process and produce finished compost in a matter of weeks. For faster decomposition, shred or chop materials into small pieces and/or add some earthworms. If materials do not decay, you may have to re-layer the pile with new materials.

DIG IN!!

No matter which preparation method you choose, your finished compost dish will be dark brown in color, crumbly in texture and have an earthy smell like rich soil. Serve up the finished compost from the bottom of the bin as you keep adding layers to the top for a steady supply of mulch for trees and plants, slow release fertilizer for lawns, and nutritious additions to flower and vegetable gardens!