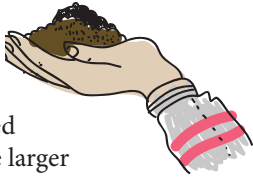


How to use Compost

Compost is ready to use when the materials are reduced to a dark, rich humus. If some larger pieces are not decomposed, you can sift those out and use them to start a new batch. Compost can be added to the soil at any time to help keep plants healthy. It improves soil structure, holds moisture, provides plant nutrients, and introduces beneficial organisms into the soil. Here are the most common ways to use compost:



Soil Amendment

Compost can be used to enrich garden soils before planting. Mix 4 to 6 inches of compost into newly reclaimed or poor soils. Mix 1 to 3 inches into annual garden beds each year, or into soil under and around new trees and shrubs before planting.



Mulch

By spreading 2 to 3 inches of compost over the soil around plants, trees, shrubs, and exposed slopes, gardeners and landscapers suppress weeds, keep plant roots cool and moist, conserve water, maintain a loose and porous surface, and prevent soil erosion.



Potting Mix

Make a potting mix by mixing two parts compost, one part soil, and one part sand. Be sure your compost is fully decomposed (black and crumbly) before using it.



Compost Troubleshooting

Symptoms	Problems	Solutions
Pile not composting	Too dry	Add water until damp as a wrung-out sponge
	Too much dry, woody material (lack of nitrogen)	Turn, add fresh green materials or organic nitrogen fertilizer (manure)
Pile smells rotten and/or attracts flies	Pile is too wet or compacted	Turn, add dry materials
	Contains non-compostable materials	Remove meat, grease, etc. and turn
Pile has sharp, ammonia-like odor	Too much green material or food	Turn to get more oxygen in pile, add dry or woody materials
Rodents in pile	Food in open bin, holes larger than 1/4"	Turn, rodent-proof by making holes smaller than 1/4"
	Contains non-compostable materials	Remove meat, grease, etc. and turn
Low pile temperature	Pile is too small (less than 3' x 3' x 3')	Collect more materials and mix the new with the old, cover top, insulate sides

Composting Resources

Your county cooperative extension office: extension.uga.edu/county-offices.html
Georgia Recycling Coalition: georgiarecycles.org
U.S. Composting Council: compostingcouncil.org

Adapted from “Composting at Home In Georgia,” a brochure originally produced by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs. Compost illustrations: Vecteezy.com

Georgia Backyard Composting



Why Compost?

Composting is an easy way to transform your landscape trimmings and fruit and vegetable scraps into a dark, crumbly, sweet-smelling soil amendment. Organic materials represent about 36% of our waste stream and recycling them is a natural way to reduce the amount of materials going to landfills and conserve natural resources.

Composting is recycling, it:

- **Saves you money** by potentially lowering garbage bills and replacing the need for commercial soil amendments
- **Helps your garden and container plants** by improving the fertility and health of your soil
- **Saves water** by helping the soil hold moisture and reducing water runoff
- **Benefits the environment** by recycling valuable organic resources and reducing the use of fuel to transport yard trimmings off-site and process them on a large scale

What Can You Compost?

Do Compost

- Grass clippings
- Leaves
- Shrub prunings (chopped)
- Flowers
- Weeds
- Sawdust
- Hair
- Fruit/vegetable scraps
- Coffee grounds/tea bags
- Uncoated paper (small amounts)

Don't Compost

- Meat
- Bones
- Dairy products
- Fish
- Greasy foods
- Dog/cat feces
- Unchopped woody debris
- Diseased plants
- Coated paper

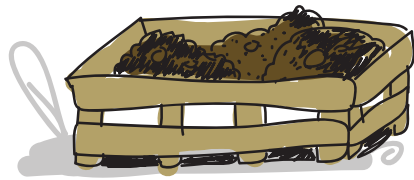


Compost Structures

From No Tech to High Tech

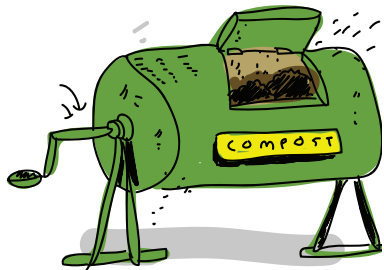
No matter your situation, there is a composting solution for you! Pick a structure that's the right size, style, cost, and effort level for you. Also keep in mind, you can use recycled materials and containers when constructing your compost bin.

HEAPS are the least organized way to compost, but also require the least effort. Simply pile your yard waste and let it sit. If you choose to turn it once in a while it will decompose faster. Otherwise just leave it and in one to two years it will turn to compost.



HOOPS (usually made from chicken or hog wire) are easy, fairly inexpensive to build, and help keep your compost pile tidy. Secure the hoop with hooks or twists of wire. To speed composting, undo the hoop, set it up next to the pile, and turn the pile back into the cage in its new location.

BINS neatly contain yard trimmings, and when made rodent-proof, work well for composting food wastes. Build with recycled wood, wire, or other materials for an inexpensive and attractive structure. Many styles are also commercially available.



Basic Compost Recipe

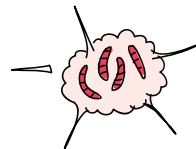
The bugs, fungi, bacteria, and worms in your yard or worm bin do most of the composting for you. The basic recipe for composting is to:

1. **CHOP** compostables. The more you chop, the faster the decomposition process takes place.
2. **MIX** 2/3 dry, brown material (leaves, straw, shredded wood) with 1/3 moist, green materials for a balance of nutrients, air, and water.
3. **ADD** water as you build your pile and maintain its moisture level so your pile is as damp as a wrung-out sponge. Proper moisture is essential for organisms to break down organic materials into compost.



BUCKETS are the apartment-dweller's answer to composting food scraps indoors or out. Used 5 gallon buckets with sealable lids can be often be found for free at many grocery stores and restaurants. Stir the compost-soil mixture to aerate it once or twice a week. Be sure to fill your bucket only half-full for easy stirring.

WORM BINS or BOXES can be used to compost kitchen scraps indoors or out. Convenient for small spaces, they give off little odor. Worms typically eat their own weight in kitchen scraps per day, but are picky eaters. They don't eat yard trimmings – only fruit and vegetable scraps. Worm bins/boxes can be made at home or purchased at the store. The most important thing to remember is to allow for plenty of holes to provide the worms adequate air to breathe.



Composting Methods

No Fuss Compost

The easiest way to compost yard trimmings.

Ingredients: *Yard trimmings, water as needed*

Directions:

1. In a heap, hoop, or bin, layer your chopped yard trimmings as they accumulate.
2. Water so compost is kept as moist as a wrung-out sponge.

In 12-18 months, the material at the bottom and center of the pile will be a dark, crumbly compost. Sift and use the uncomposted material to start a new pile. Covering your bin or pile helps control its moisture content by either retaining moisture during hot months or repelling water during rainy months.



Worm Compost

Worm composting, also known as vermicomposting, is a fun way to turn kitchen scraps into a rich fertilizer and soil amendment. This form of composting is popular with schools and people with no yards.

Ingredients: *Fruit and vegetable trimmings, newspapers, and red worms. To start, use a 2:1 worms to food weight ratio (e.g., 2 lbs. worms to 1 lb. kitchen scraps)*

Directions:

1. Shred and moisten old newspapers (black and white pages only) and layer them 6 inches deep in a well-ventilated plastic or wooden box.
2. Add worms and kitchen scraps (no meat).
3. Add fresh scraps as they become available.

In 3-6 months, harvest your compost by moving it all to one side of the bin and adding fresh newspaper to the empty side. Then bury fresh kitchen scraps in the new bedding. The worms will migrate to the new area, allowing you to retrieve the finished compost.

Fast Compost

The fastest composting method requires turning the pile frequently to get plenty of oxygen to the organisms breaking down the materials and creating heat. Temperatures in the pile can reach 120-150° F during "fast" composting, ensuring that weed seeds and pathogens are killed. An extended-length thermometer will give the most accurate temperature readings.

Ingredients: *Yard trimmings, fruit and vegetable scraps, and water as needed*

Directions:

1. Alternate and mix fresh green with dry brown materials in layers until the pile is at least one cubic yard (3' x 3' x 3').
2. Water so compost is kept as moist as a wrung-out sponge.
3. Cover the pile with a sheet of plastic, a piece of carpet, or a 1-inch layer of soil.
4. Turn the pile 1-3 times a week to give it the air it needs for fast composting.

The compost will be ready to use in 1-3 months when it has degraded into a rich, dark humus. Sift and use uncomposted material to start a new pile.

Bucket Compost

The most compact way to compost kitchen scraps.

Ingredients: *Kitchen scraps, dry material (soil, sawdust, straw)*



Directions:

1. Add chopped kitchen scraps to a 5-gallon bucket. Mix in an equal amount of dry material at least once a week. If too wet, add more dry material.
2. Stir thoroughly each time you add materials.
3. When bucket is 3/4 full, let stand 1-3 months, mixing it every 1-2 weeks.

Use finished compost in garden or planters as it is produced.