



Cooperative Extension

Tompkins County

Compost Education
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Preparation of Food Scraps for Faster Composting

The **good news** is that composting is a natural and powerful process, and if you manage it right you can get great finished compost with **very little work**.

The **even better news** is that if you take a few minutes to cut food scraps into smaller pieces, the composting will happen even faster. The key is that the organisms that do most of the breakdown are tiny and they work *just on the surface area* of food – the smaller the pieces, the more the surface area!

What you need:

- container for collecting food scraps – milk cartons, cereal boxes, or small plastic buckets work well
- kitchen knife or scissors
- cutting board



What to do:

- line your compost container with newspaper – this makes emptying and cleaning the container much easier
- place the container in a convenient spot – on the countertop, under the sink, on a porch, etc.
- do not cover the container! This just promotes odors due to fermentation.

What goes in?

- any vegetable or fruit scraps
apple cores, orange peels, banana peels, potato skins, corn cobs, garlic tops, wilted lettuce, ...
- egg shells -- crush them up a bit
- inedible leftovers of prepared foods
pizza, last week's dinner, moldy bread, etc.
- coffee grounds and filters
- tea bags (except those made of nylon) -- tear the bag and remove the staple
- pizza boxes, newspaper, paper towels, cereal boxes, ... any non-waxy paper



What doesn't go in?

- No meat, fat, dairy products, bones, or raw eggs (these materials would break down, but they risk attracting pests)
- No plastic, metal, glass, rubber bands, twist-ties, etc.

What are the steps?

- While preparing your meal, or after eating a snack, cut the leftovers or food scraps into smaller pieces, to accelerate their breakdown in the compost bin
- Place the scraps in the compost container
- Cover food scraps with used paper towels, torn newspaper strips, or a handful of leaves or sawdust to prevent odors and fruit flies
- When container is full, take it out to the compost bin and empty it, and cover well with a layer of "browns" (dried leaves, woodchips, straw, torn paper, etc.)
- Clean the container out, line it with fresh newspaper, and return it to its spot!

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