Quick-Start Guide to Compost
In nature, compostable organic matter will decompose without our help, with the resulting matter going back into the environment.

Composting is the managed decomposition of organic matter:

A. We build a healthy place for decomposing organisms to do their job.

B. We feed the bin with nutritious food scraps and garden trimmings (greens & browns).

C. We make sure it has enough water and air.

D. We harvest the results to enrich our soil.

Cornell Cooperative Extension Tompkins County

Master Composters of Tompkins County
Why Compost

Same apple, very different journey.

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**It Saves Money**
Compost is a high-quality soil amendment that can be used instead of expensive bagged products.

**It Reduces Carbon Footprint**
Less fuel and electricity is used to transport and process waste.

**It's Good for the Earth**
Adding compost enriches the soil, helping gardens grow without chemicals.

**It Reduces Landfill Use**
Not only does it alleviate pressure on our infrastructure, it reduces outgassing into the air and leachate seeping into groundwater.

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Where To Compost

Composting begins in your kitchen.

1. Pick a container that’s the right size to hold the amount of food scraps you produce.
2. Use a tight-fitting lid to discourage fruit flies and odors.
3. Line with newspaper to absorb moisture and make cleanup easy.

Then, it moves into a compost bin or pile of your choice.

Indoors

Outdoors

Amount of Scraps

Set-up effort Speed

Property Size Cost Maintenance

My Perfect Compost Bin

Whether you place your bin in the sun or in the shade,* by your back door or on the back forty, the best place for a compost bin is where you will remember to use it best.

*Sun versus shade placement only impacts moisture level. Sunny bins may dry out, shady bins may get too wet.

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What To Compost

Your home compost bin is a strict vegetarian. Only include plant or plant-based materials. (except eggshells & hair or fur)

You Can Compost
Fruits & Veggies
Bread & Pasta
Tea & Tea Bags
Coffee Grounds & Filters
Newspaper, shredded
Eggs, crumbled
Napkins & Paper Towels
Uncoated Paper Plates
Yard Waste
Manures*
Dryer Lint
Untreated Sawdust
Hair
Natural Fibers
*Include Manure & Bedding from any herbivore (cows, horses, hamsters, rabbits, etc)

Don’t Compost
Meats*
Eggs or Dairy*
Plastic
Cooking Oil or Oily Sauces*
Plastic-coated Paper
Wax-Coated Paper*
Metal
Rocks
Compostable Utensils*
Invasive Weeds
Weed Seeds
Diseased Plants
Diapers
Dog or Cat Waste
*A commercial compost facility can handle these since they compost at very high temps.

Size Matters!
Your compost bin breaks down food the same way your body does: The bigger the particle the longer it will take to digest. If your item is larger than a whole apple, chop it up.

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How To Compost

A compost bin is actually a **habitat** for compost “D.O.ers” ([Decomposing Organisms](https://example.com)). Layer the right amounts of **air, water, and food**, and they will produce rich compost.

**Water**  **Oxygen**  **Nitrogen**  **Carbon**

Balance these inputs for successful compost!

- Too much water will make your compost slimy and smelly.
- Too much air will dry the bin and bring composting to a halt.
- Too much nitrogen (greens) will make your compost smelly.
- Too much carbon (browns) will slow composting.

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**How to Lasagna Layer**

1. **Start With Sticks**
   - 8” of criss-crossed sticks ensures airflow, just like when building a fire.

2. **Add Browns**
   - Add a layer of leaves or other carbon materials - higher on the sides, lower in the middle (bowl-shaped).

3. **Add Greens**
   - Add grass clippings, food scraps or other nitrogen materials in a thin layer in the “bowl.”

4. **Cover the Greens**
   - Add a 1-2” layer of browns - enough to completely cover the greens.

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Using Compost

Harvest time!
Is it ready? If you’ve been turning your compost, check it after 6-8 months. If not, wait a year. Use your senses to find out:

It should look uniformly dark with no recognizable food. (pits & egg shells may persist)

It should smell like rich soil, nothing more.

It should feel crumbly and moist, as if you mixed damp soil and mulch.

For most bins (except for the tumbler types), the stuff at the bottom will be finished months before the stuff at the top.

Somewhere around the halfway point you’ll start seeing finished compost

Step 1: Lift or disassemble your bin, reassemble it right next your pile, this will be its new home.

Step 2: Place sticks at the bottom of your empty bin for aeration.

Step 3: Shovel the stuff at the top of your pile into your empty bin. Keep any uncomposted food to the middle of the pile. Keep going until you reach finished compost.

Step 4: Use the finished compost:

As mulch around trees and plants

Dug in a few inches from the base of plants

Sifted through a screen and used in seed starting or potting mixes

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Questions?
visit: ccetompkins.org/compost

call: the “Rotline” at 607-272-2292
stop in: 615 Willow Ave; Ithaca, NY