




## **ON SITE** **Multi-Family Composting**

*A guide for apartment & condo residents*



**At least 40%**  
of residential waste  
is compostable.

## Multi-Family Composting

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There are many ways to compost, and homeowners who compost in their yards have the freedom to manage their bins however they choose. Multi-family and community composting require teamwork and communication, which can be fostered through meetings, work parties, or events. Composting is easy to do, but there may be hidden barriers for some people. Focus on improving accessibility rather than enforcing participation.

## Composting: *a sustainable practice*

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Composting is a waste management method that was practiced for millennia by cultures all over the world. Communities disposed of food, yard, human, and animal waste in ways that returned nutrients to the soil. During the post-war period of the twentieth century, chemicals initially intended for warfare were modified to provide food for plants in the form of fertilizer, making compost seem irrelevant.



**Compost looks like soil, but it acts like a fertilizer**, adding nutrients and living organisms to the sand, silt, and clay minerals in soil.

## Collect Your Food Scraps (GREENS)

Food scraps contain high amounts of nitrogen, and are sometimes referred to as greens. You can collect your kitchen scraps in any container with a lid. To minimize smells and fruit flies, transfer to your outdoor bin regularly, add brown material such as paper or sawdust, store in your freezer, or get a pail with a carbon filter.

**Greens to add: vegetables, fruit, coffee grounds, tea bags, eggshells, plain rice/pasta/bread, indoor and outdoor plants.**



ZESTY FRUIT



CAULI FLOWER



CORN



PEAS



CRUSHED  
EGG SHELLS



GINGER  
ROOT



TEA BAGS



APPLES



BROCCOLI



COFFEE  
GROUNDS



GRASS  
CLIPPINGS

Grass clippings act as a natural fertilizer when left on lawns. Do not compost any grass that has been sprayed with a persistent herbicide.

## Collect Your *Autumn Leaves* (BROWNS)

Dry plant materials such as leaves contain high amounts of carbon, and are sometimes referred to as browns. Browns are usually stored in the middle of a triple bin system, or in a separate container.

Cover the greens in your bin with double the volume of browns to eliminate smells, speed up the decomposition process, and create higher quality compost.

**Browns to add: dry autumn leaves, straw, sawdust, twigs, woodchips from untreated wood, shredded paper, napkins.**



When browns get wet, they begin decomposing, so a solid lid or roof for your "browns" bin may be helpful.



## Items To Avoid

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Municipal green bin programs operate large-scale composting systems that are capable of breaking down many products. In a compost bin, it is difficult to reach ideal temperatures consistently. Avoiding the materials identified here will prevent odours, pests, and the spread of weeds and plant diseases.

**Do not add: dairy products, meat, bones, pet waste, diseased plants, weeds, or compostable plastics.**



Save your weeds, diseased plants, and large plant material for the city's yard waste collection program.



The release of carbon dioxide and water vapour accounts for a **50% loss in the weight** of your composting materials.

## Triple Bin Composting

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To speed up the composting process and make harvesting easier, fill one compost bin at a time and switch to another bin when the first bin is full. In warm weather, you can aerate and check moisture levels on the “Don’t Add” bin as little as once a month. A proper balance of greens, browns, moisture, and oxygen will attract the microorganisms required to do most of the work for you.

Once your “Add” bin is full, put a thick layer of browns on top and switch to the “Don’t Add” sign.

# How Composting Works

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A teaspoon of healthy soil has up to a billion bacteria, thousands of protozoa, dozens of nematodes, and meters of fungal networks.



Beneficial bacteria and fungi eat your food scraps, generating heat in the initial stages, and attracting insects such as ants and sowbugs in the final stages. These microorganisms need oxygen and 50% moisture to survive. An absence of unpleasant smells indicates you've got the right amount of oxygen.

Use a pitchfork or aerator to add oxygen to your bin. Increase moisture with cooled water from boiled vegetables, or leave the lid off your bin when it rains.



## Odourless Composting

When composting is done properly, there are no unpleasant smells. Flies and bad odours are an indication that something is wrong.

In warm weather, it is advisable to cover greens with a layer of browns anytime you add to your bin. In the winter adding browns is unnecessary, but every spring you'll need to add a sufficient amount of brown material to balance all the greens that were added during winter.

To get compost up to twice a year, regularly aerate a moist balance of one part greens and two parts browns.



When organics break down without oxygen, they release methane gas, which is **30 times more harmful than carbon dioxide.**



Healthy soil contains **5-10% organic matter**. Compost increases soil organic matter, acting as a remedy for soil imbalances.

## Using Your Compost

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An earthy smell and an absence of heat, insects, and recognizable items indicates that your compost is ready to use. Finished compost looks like soil but it is actually a natural fertilizer, so potted plants do not need more than one part compost for each part soil. If you run out of garden and house plants to fertilize, your neighbourhood trees will gratefully accept compost.

You can mix finished compost into your soil, but putting it directly on top of grass or soil is also effective. Give plant stems and tree trunks some breathing room when putting compost around them.

## Before You Compost That...

By composting on site, you eliminate the carbon dioxide from transporting food scraps to waste management sites. You also reduce the methane gas that is released when food decomposes without oxygen, which is what happens in a landfill. However, the amount of energy required to produce food means that composting should be your last option.

Minimize food waste as much as possible: plan ahead, buy what you need, cook what you can eat, and store leftovers for later.

30% of edible food grown around the world is wasted, and half of that waste is generated in the home.



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Green Action Centre is a non-profit hub that promotes greener and better living by sharing practical solutions and advocating for change.