

# Home Composting Guide

*A simple, reliable system for yard + kitchen composting*

Composting turns everyday organic waste into rich soil that improves gardens, lawns, and houseplants. Done correctly, it **does not smell**, **does not attract pests**, and **requires only light maintenance**.

This guide covers:

- How to set up a compost pile or bin
  - What materials you need (once and ongoing)
  - What to add and what to avoid
  - How to maintain compost week to week
  - A quick reference cheat sheet
  - A seasonal composting schedule
- 

## 1. Composting Basics (Plain English)

Compost works by supporting **microorganisms** that break down organic material. These microbes need:

- **Greens** → nitrogen-rich, wet materials (food scraps, fresh plants)
- **Browns** → carbon-rich, dry materials (leaves, paper, cardboard)
- **Air** → for aerobic decomposition (no bad smells)
- **Water** → moisture like a wrung-out sponge

If compost smells bad, it's almost always:

- too wet
- too many greens
- not enough air

All of these are easy to fix.

---

## 2. Choosing a Compost Setup

### Option A: Open Pile (Best for yards)

**Good for:** larger yards, lots of leaves/grass

**Pros:** cheap, flexible, fast

**Cons:** less tidy, harder to manage pests

#### How:

- Create a pile directly on soil
  - Minimum size: ~3 ft × 3 ft × 3 ft
- 

### Option B: Compost Bin (Best for beginners)

**Good for:** most households

**Pros:** tidy, pest-resistant, easier to manage

**Cons:** slightly slower if not turned

#### Types:

- Plastic stationary bin
- DIY bin (wood pallets or wire fencing)
- Tumbler (easier turning, smaller capacity)

For beginners, a **stationary bin with a removable lid** is ideal.

---

### 3. Where to Place Your Compost

Choose a spot that is:

- On bare soil (important for drainage and microbes)
- Partially shaded (prevents drying out)
- Convenient to reach year-round
- Away from house walls

Avoid:

- Solid concrete or asphalt
  - Full sun in hot climates
  - Low spots that flood
-

## 4. Materials You'll Need

### One-Time Setup

- Compost bin or open pile space
- Garden fork or shovel (for turning)
- Optional: wire mesh for pest barrier under bin

### Ongoing Materials

You already generate most of this at home.

#### “Greens” (Nitrogen)

- ✓ Fruit & vegetable scraps
- ✓ Coffee grounds & filters
- ✓ Tea leaves (no plastic bags)
- ✓ Grass clippings (thin layers)
- ✓ Fresh weeds (no seeds)

#### “Browns” (Carbon)

- ✓ Dry leaves
  - ✓ Shredded cardboard
  - ✓ Shredded newspaper (black ink only)
  - ✓ Paper towels (not greasy)
  - ✓ Straw or dried grass
-

## 5. What NOT to Compost (Beginner Rule)

Avoid these in basic home composting:

- Meat, fish, bones
- Dairy
- Greasy or oily foods
- Pet waste
- Diseased plants
- Large branches (unless chipped)

These cause odors, pests, or pathogens.

---

## 6. How to Start Your Compost (Step-by-Step)

1. **Start with browns**  
Lay down 6–8 inches of dry leaves or cardboard.
  2. **Add greens**  
Add a thin layer of food scraps or grass.
  3. **Cover with browns**  
Always cover food scraps with dry material.
  4. **Moisten lightly**  
If dry, sprinkle water. Compost should feel like a damp sponge.
  5. **Repeat layers**  
Think: *greens buried in browns*.
-

## 7. Ongoing Compost Maintenance

### Weekly (or every 1–2 weeks)

- Add kitchen scraps
- Cover with browns
- Check moisture

### Monthly

- Turn the pile with a fork or shovel
- Mix outer material into the center

### Moisture Check

- Too dry? → add water or fresh greens
- Too wet? → add browns and turn

### Smell Check

- **Earthy smell** = perfect
  - **Rotten smell** = too wet or too many greens
- 

## 8. How Long Compost Takes

- **Fast compost (well-managed):** 2–4 months
- **Slow compost (low effort):** 6–12 months

Finished compost looks like:

- Dark brown or black
  - Crumbly
  - Smells like soil
  - No recognizable food
-

## 9. Using Finished Compost

Use compost to:

- Mix into garden beds
  - Top-dress lawns
  - Improve potting soil (mix ~25–30%)
  - Mulch around trees and shrubs
- 

# QUICK REFERENCE CHEAT SHEET

## Ideal Compost Balance

- **2–3 parts browns : 1 part greens**

## If Compost Is...

- **Smelly** → add browns + turn
- **Dry** → add water or greens
- **Not breaking down** → add greens + turn
- **Attracting pests** → bury food deeper, add browns

## Best Kitchen Scraps

- Veggie scraps
- Coffee grounds
- Eggshells (crushed)

## Always Cover Food Scraps

Yes. Every time.

---

# SEASONAL COMPOSTING SCHEDULE

## Spring

- Start new pile or refresh old one
- Add early grass clippings (thin layers)
- Turn pile more often as temps rise

## Summer

- Compost breaks down fastest
- Watch moisture (add water if dry)
- Bury food scraps well to avoid pests

## Fall

- **Best composting season**
- Add lots of dry leaves (stockpile extras!)
- Build large piles for winter

## Winter

- Compost slows but doesn't stop
- Keep adding kitchen scraps
- Insulate pile with leaves or straw
- Turn less frequently

---

## Final Beginner Advice

- Composting does not need to be perfect
- Nature is forgiving
- If you remember only one rule:  
**When in doubt, add browns**