



Let it rot

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If you're looking to enrich your life, start composting.

"Backyard composting is the single best thing you can do for the environment," says Susan Antler, executive director of the Compost Council of Canada.

The message that it's OK to let organics rot is spread around the world annually during Compost Awareness Week — this year it's May 2-8.

Up to 50% of the waste stream is organic and when composted, Antler says, it can have a "rain-bow" of environmental benefits including reducing water consumption and greenhouse gas emissions, and enriching soil.

"Compost is the essence of good healthy nutritious soil. If you don't replenish your soil over time, you deplete nutrients from the earth," she said. "And it's free!"

HOW DO YOU MAKE A COMPOST PILE?



After 3-4 turnings, the compost should be ready. It should be crumbly, moist, dark-coloured and have an earthy smell. Allow this material to mature for a couple of months before using.

Continue to mix the pile every 10-14 days. Note: Pile may heat up and shrink after being turned.

When the compost is full, mix it up with a garden fork or turning tool.

Continue to alternate layers of green & brown until your compost bin is full.

Monitor moisture: It should be like a wrung out sponge — damp but not soaking. Add water if pile is dry. If too wet, add some browns.

Cover green material with browns. This reduces fruit flies and odours. A layer of soil will work in place of the browns. Soil has the added benefit of supplying "starter" micro-organisms to accelerate the process.

Add a layer of greens, such as kitchen scraps, garden trimmings or grass clippings and spread evenly.

Save some bags of dry leaves every fall for compost use.

WHAT CAN I COMPOST?

"Greens"

Nitrogen Rich Materials

- Kitchen scraps including vegetables and fruit scraps, crushed egg shells, tea bags, coffee grounds with filters and paper towels
- Garden and yard materials
- Grass clippings — or leave this natural fertilizer on the lawn

"Browns"

Carbon Rich Materials

- Dry leaves
- Bread, pasta and rice
- Sawdust and shavings
- Finely-ground wood chips
- Well-shredded paper
- Shredded egg cartons, cardboard

WHAT CAN'T I COMPOST?

- Pet manure or litter
- Weeds that have gone to seed
- Any diseased plants
- Meat, fish, fowl or the bones
- Fats or oils (dairy products, eggs, peanut butter, spreads) — these materials break down slowly and may attract pests or cause odours
- Ash, sawdust or shavings from chemically treated or painted wood

It's all about balance. If your compost pile is too full of browns, it will be slow to decompose. If the pile is too full of greens, it will turn slimy and smell bad. The goal is to have roughly equal amounts, by weight, of browns and greens.

- 1 Purchase a compost bin from your municipality or nearby warehouse store; or make one using cedar posts and wire mesh.
- 2 Select a sunny, well-drained area to set up your bin and loosen the soil. This will allow insects and worms to move up the pile.
- 3 Put down a thick layer of browns, such as dry leaves or shredded paper.

WHY SHOULD YOU COMPOST?



Less garbage
Organics represent over one-third of materials being sent to landfills, and over 50% of total waste.



Reduce gases
Landfills account for about 38% of Canada's methane emissions, which is 23 times more potent than carbon dioxide.



Recover valuable materials
Compost is the single most important ingredient for healthy and productive soil.



Decrease erosion
Compost helps enhance soil structure. We're losing an estimated 1% of our topsoil annually.



Reduce the need to water
By improving the soil structure, water is retained and available for plants.



Reduce pesticides
Compost naturally suppresses plant diseases.



Save money
Turn organics into valuable soil without spending a dime.



Healthy garden
Compost provides essential organic matter, which is important for its health and vitality.