

## Compost problems?

Most common problems will be solved by adding brown materials, which will balance moisture, eliminate odour, and discourage flies.

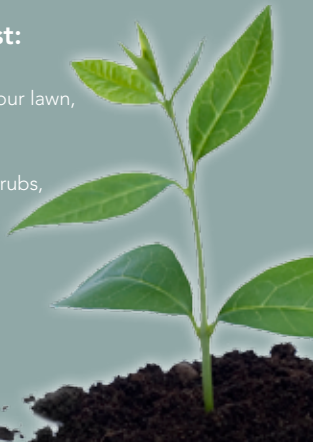
Symptom	Diagnosis	Treatment
Bin has a bad odour.	Not enough air; pile is too wet	Turn pile. Add coarse, dry materials such as straw or cornstalks.
Pile is dry throughout.	Not enough water. Too much woody material.	Turn and moisten materials. Add fresh waste. Cover pile to reduce evaporation.
Compost material is damp and warm only in the middle.	Not enough material in the bin.	Collect more material and mix the new ingredients into the old.
Material is damp and sweet-smelling, but not heating up.	Lack of nitrogen.	Mix in a nitrogen-rich (green) material such as fresh grass clippings, fresh manure, or blood meal.
Pests around bin (dogs, rodents, insects).	Improper food trimmings added, or materials not covered well enough.	Do not add meat, fats, bones or animal waste. Use an animal-resistant compost bin.
Flies at compost bin.	Food scraps not covered. Not enough brown material.	Put fruit and vegetable scraps in centre of bin; cover with soil or brown material.
Fruit flies in kitchen.	Scraps are attracting fruit flies.	Keep kitchen scrap collection pail in the refrigerator or freezer.

### Questions?

Call the Regional Compost Hotline at 604-736-2250.

### How to use your compost:

- **Feed your lawn:**  
Rake a layer of compost onto your lawn, about 5 mm (¼") thick.
- **Use it in your garden:**  
Spread it around the base of shrubs, trees and perennials.
- **Make potting soil:**  
1/3 sifted compost  
1/3 soil  
1/3 vermiculite
- **Have a small garden?**  
Share it with your neighbours or the garden in your complex.



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## Composting replicates nature's way of breaking down vegetation using good bacteria and other organisms.

### Five great reasons to compost

#### 1. Reduce your garbage

Organic waste (such as kitchen vegetable scraps and garden clippings) make up 30% per cent of the household garbage currently being sent to the landfill. Composting your organic waste is a great way to reduce this volume.

#### 2. It's easy

Setting up a compost in your household is simple and inexpensive. Everyone in the home can participate and feel good about making a difference.

#### 3. Help the environment

Less waste means less trucks on the road, less methane gas generated from the landfills, and recycling nutrients back into the earth.

#### 4. Improve your garden

Your compost will help your garden soil retain moisture after rain or watering.

#### 5. Reduce use of chemical fertilizers

Keep local waterways clean by avoiding chemical fertilizers. Composting returns nutrients to the garden.

### Ready to get gardening?

Visit [www.growgreenguide.ca](http://www.growgreenguide.ca) for great ideas and practical solutions for healthy, sustainable lawns and gardens.

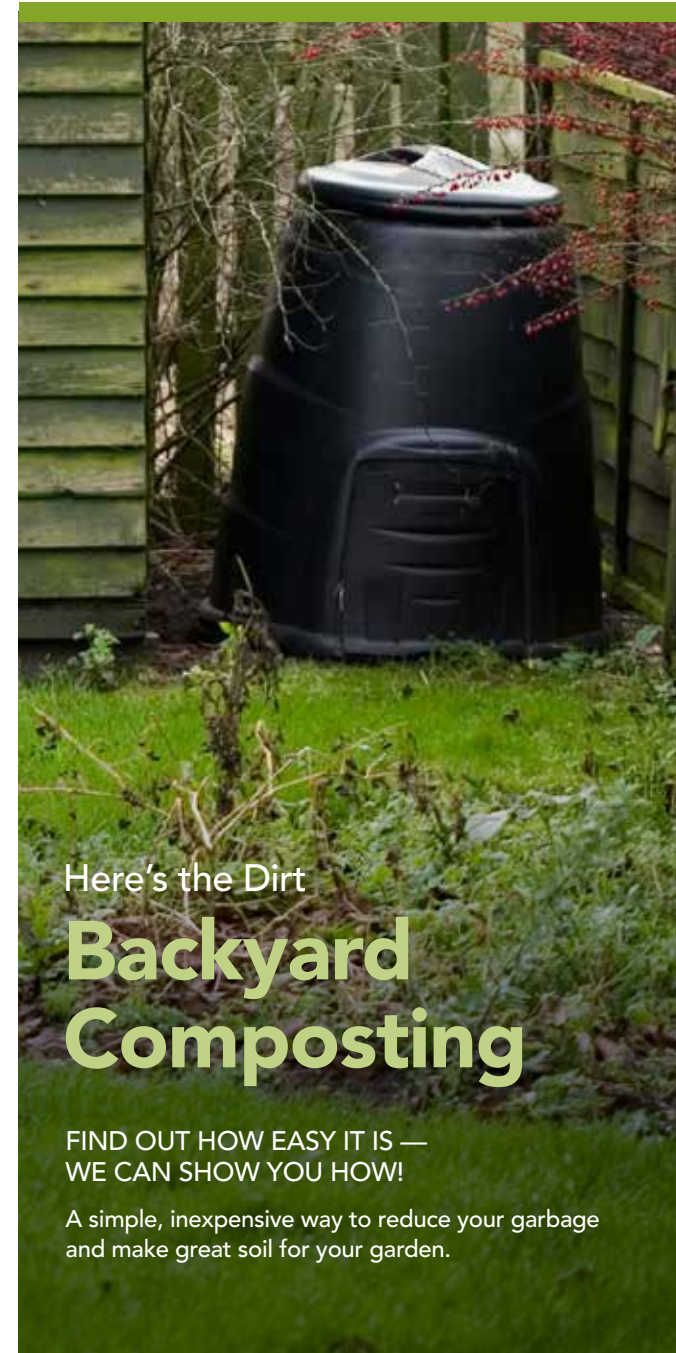
This publication is available online as a PDF.

Search for "Backyard Composting" or its partner brochure, "Worm Composting", at [metrovancover.org](http://metrovancover.org)

For copies contact the Metro Vancouver Information Centre at 604-432-6200 or email [icentre@metrovancover.org](mailto:icentre@metrovancover.org)

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Here's the Dirt

# Backyard Composting

FIND OUT HOW EASY IT IS —  
WE CAN SHOW YOU HOW!

A simple, inexpensive way to reduce your garbage and make great soil for your garden.

 SERVICES AND SOLUTIONS FOR A LIVABLE REGION

# Backyard Composting: 10 easy steps

1. **Choose** a flat, partly-sunny area with good drainage.
2. **Purchase a bin** from your municipality or a store or build your own animal-resistant compost bin. Keeping a lid on your bin will help keep out rain and animals.

**tip:** The ideal compost bin size is one cubic metre in order to retain the heat it generates.

3. **Create a 6–10 cm base layer** using straw, leaves, or woody brushy material to promote air circulation.

4. **Alternate layers** of green (nitrogen-rich) and brown (carbon-rich) materials. See the chart for a list of acceptable and unacceptable materials.

**tip:** Chop up large materials for faster decomposition.

5. **Whenever you add a food scrap layer**, top it off with a layer of brown material (5–8 cm). Alternating green and brown material will promote a healthy compost.

**tip:** In the fall, collect dry leaves into old garbage containers so that you can use them year-round.



6. **Mix bin contents** every week or two. This aerates the materials and gets the bin heating up again, allowing them to decompose faster. Purchase an aerator tool or use an old ski pole or broom handle.
7. **Moisture content** of the bin should be like a wrung-out dishrag. Only add water if it is very dry after mixing.

**tip:** To maintain proper moisture content, balance the amount of green and brown materials.

8. **Pile will shrink.** Continue to add layers of green and brown materials until bin is almost full.
9. **Compost is generally ready to use** after about 2–3 months; however, aging the compost for another 1–2 months is recommended.

**tip:** If you have room, set up two composters so you can add to one bin as the other one matures.

10. **Harvest** your compost when the compost at the bottom and centre is decomposed and moist. Dig out the compost with a shovel, using the door at the bottom of a commercial bin; or if you have built your own, remove the top new layers and dig the compost from the centre.

**tip:** You may choose to sift your compost through a mesh screen to remove large chunks or unfinished material.



## How to find your compost bin

Contact your municipality to inquire if there is a compost bin or workshop program available to you. Many home and garden supply stores also carry bins. To construct your own animal-resistant bin, look online at [metrovancover.org](http://metrovancover.org) and search "compost bin construction".

## Discourage animals

A compost pile can become a home and food source for animals. Discourage them by composting only the appropriate food scraps (see chart), burying food scraps in existing material, and using an animal-resistant compost bin.



## Compost responsibly

Please don't dump your compost materials in nearby parks or natural areas. Instead of naturally breaking down into soil, dumped compost can cause problems with pests, invasive plant species, and soil erosion.



## What to compost:

Green material (nitrogen-rich)		
✓	Kitchen scraps	Vegetable and fruit material.
✓	Coffee grounds and tea leaves	
✓	Vegetables and fruit	Cut into thumb-sized pieces for faster composting. Note: no salad dressing.
✓	Plant trimmings from your garden	Leaves, old flowers, end-of-season greenery.
✓	Grass clippings (fresh)	Best used as a mulch on your lawn; not from lawns recently treated with pesticides.
✓	Large leafy weeds	Not once in seed, and only when still green. Avoid invasive weeds like morning glory.
✓	Rhubarb leaves	Safe for composting. Note: contain a natural chemical, oxalate, making leaves (NOT stems) poisonous to eat in large amounts.
✓	Pet manure	Use only from grass eaters such as rabbits, gerbils, guinea pigs, sheep, horses or cows.

Brown material (carbon-rich)		
✓	Leaves	Save leaves from the fall in a dry bin. Note: Oak leaves are good, but they decompose slowly, so use few. Coniferous needles are not a source of brown material.
✓	Grass clippings (dry)	
✓	Straw	Excellent carbon source; can use in place of leaves.
✓	Corn cobs, corn stalks	
✓	Paper towels and napkins	
✓	Newsprint	Shred or tear.
✓	Cardboard	Cut some into small pieces to compost. Recycle large pieces.
✓	Brown paper bags	Shred or tear.

Other acceptable materials		
✓	Eggshells	Rinse and crush.
✓	Wood ash from a fireplace	Can compost but best to add directly to garden.

Unacceptable materials		
✗	Grease, cooked food including rice or pasta, oils	Attracts animals and pests. Composts very slowly. Can cause odour problems.
✗	Fish, meat, bones	Attracts animals and can cause odour problems.
✗	Dog or cat feces*	Meat-eating animals can carry disease.
✗	Kitty litter	May contain chemicals and disease organisms.
✗	Barbecue ash, coal	Contains chemicals such as sulphur oxides.

\* Note: Dog feces can be composted in a separate container, keeping it out of the garbage. Curious? See [metrovancover.org](http://metrovancover.org) and search "compost dog waste".