

Composting Basics



Have you ever smelled rotting food? Think of that smell as the beginning of the composting process. The term compost refers to the dark, rich soil amendment that results at the end of a feeding process carried out by bacteria, fungi, worms, insects and other microorganisms. Compost is not soil, but it is mixed with soil to add valuable nutrients for plants. All food products can be composted including fruits, vegetables, bread, coffee grounds, egg shells, dairy products, meats and bones. However, for small-scale composting systems or home composters, it is best to avoid adding meat and/or dairy to the compost pile to prevent rodent issues, prevent harmful pathogens and ensure the food scraps decompose in a reasonable amount of time.¹

Though composting is a natural process, you will have to manage your system for the best results. Here is how to get started:

1. Select a bucket or container to store your food scraps in your home.
2. Balance your **browns** and **greens**: **Browns** refer to carbon-rich materials such as cardboard, yard waste, napkins and wood chips. **Greens** are nitrogen-rich food materials such as fruits and vegetables. A healthy compost pile contains **3 parts browns** and **1 part greens (3:1 ratio)**
3. **Moisture and Oxygen**: A healthy compost pile has both adequate water and oxygen to feed the microorganisms. This helps to maintain an active pile and the proper temperature (100° - 160 ° F).
4. For back yard composting there are various options from in-bin systems to free-standing compost piles. Choose a system that makes sense for your life. Consider the time required to manage the pile, the kinds of materials you are including in your composting system (fruits, vegetables meats dairy etc.) and how you intend to use the final product.
5. Vermicompost & Bokashi fermentation can both be done inside your home. Visit our [website](#) to determine the best composting options for your needs.

¹ University of Maryland Extension (2005) Home and Garden Information Center: Back Yard Composting. Available at: http://extension.umd.edu/sites/extension.umd.edu/files/docs/programs/hgic/HGIC_Pubs/Soil_Amendments_Compost/HG%2035%202018_BackyardComposting01.pdf

