Composting is a great way to recycle your kitchen scraps and yard trimmings, reduce your trash output and generate a free, rich soil conditioner.

Compost is typically used as mulch for your lawn and garden areas as a soil amendment prior to planting, or as a component in potting mixes.

Compost will improve your soil and plants while helping Austin be a healthier, more sustainable city.

By composting, you’re helping the City of Austin reduce the amount of trash sent to landfills, which reduces greenhouse gases and saves natural resources.

**LET NATURE DO THE WORK FOR YOU**

**BENEFITS:**
- Reduce trash
- Grow healthy, vibrant plants
- Reduce chemical use
- Protect the groundwater
- Save money
- Help Austin reach its Zero Waste goal to reduce the amount of waste sent to landfills by 90% by 2040.

**BASIC INGREDIENTS:**

- **ORGANIC MATERIALS**
- **WATER**
- **AIR**

**HOW DOES COMPOSTING WORK?**

Add nitrogen-rich greens and carbon-rich browns to your compost bin or pile.

Add water and “turn” materials.

Micro-organisms that you can’t see (such as bacteria and fungi) and macro-organisms you can see (such as rolly pollies, earth worms, & other insects) consume and break down material.

With enough air and water, the micro-organisms will produce heat.

Hot compost decomposes faster than cold compost. If there is not enough water and oxygen, the micro-organisms will die resulting in a slow rate of decomposition.

The carbon dioxide released in your backyard compost is significantly less harmful for the environment than the methane produced by organics in a landfill.
HOW TO MAKE COMPOST:

1. Each time you add materials to your pile, add roughly one share of nitrogen-rich greens and three shares of carbon-rich browns.

2. Place materials in your compost pile, pre-made compost bin or tumbler (Fig. 1-7).

3. Add some water (ex. by rinsing out your kitchen compost collector) and mix. Make sure your pile has enough air and water. The mixture should not be more moist than a wrung out sponge.

4. Turn or mix occasionally and allow decomposition to occur for a few months. Your consistency will influence your results.

- Turning | Finished compost
- once a week | 3 - 4 months
- bi-weekly | 4 - 6 months
- once a month | 8 - 12 months

Fig. 1 Wooden
Fig. 2 Wire Composter
Fig. 3 Enclosed plastic bin
Fig. 4 Cone
Fig. 5 Vermi compost system
Fig. 6 Tumbler
Fig. 7 Indoor composter
### WHAT TO PLACE IN YOUR COMPOST BIN OR PILE: “IF IT GROWS, IT GOES”

#### NITROGEN-RICH MATERIALS - “THE GREENS”

**VEGETABLE/FRUIT PEELINGS AND SCRAPs**
- Onion skins, potato peelings, lettuce, corn cobs, garlic tops, artichoke leaves, pickles
- Apple cores, banana peels, citrus peels, pineapple skin, watermelon rinds
- Spoiled vegetables and fruits (including juice), canned or from the freezer

**INEDIBLE FOOD LEFTOVERS**
- Clean & crushed egg shells, bread and pie crust, burned toast, oatmeal, stale bread, potato chips, cereal, cookies
- Old pasta, rice and tofu, popcorn, pumpkin seeds, olives, avocados and dates (including pits), nut and peanut shells
- Spices, wine gone bad and old beer, soy and rice milk, sugars, gelatin

**TEA AND COFFEE SCRAPs**
- Tea bags and leaves, coffee grounds, filters, bags and burlaps

**FRESH GRASS CLIPPINGS & PLANTS**
- Houseplant trimmings, Spanish moss

#### CARBON-RICH MATERIALS - “THE BROWNS”

**DEAD OR DRIED GRASS CLIPPINGS**
- Fallen leaves, dead or dried flowers

**WOOD CHIPS, STRAW AND HAY**
- Old, dried up herbs, aquarium plants

**PAPER**
- Wooden toothpicks, sawdust, pencil shavings

**NATURAL FIBERS**
- Paper bags, napkins, towels and tissues, newspapers, comics, tickets, cards, envelopes, receipts, paper notes, computer paper, junk mail, shredded paper, paperboard, cardboard

- Lint from clothes dryer, dust bunnies from under the bed, wool socks, vacuum cleaner bag contents, cotton swabs, cotton balls

Remember: the smaller the pieces, the faster your compost will decompose.

### WHAT NOT TO PLACE IN YOUR COMPOST BIN OR PILE:

- **All meat, poultry and fish products or bones**
- **Dairy products**
- **Very greasy and oily food**
- **Nylon tea bags**
- **Anything not biodegradable (plastic, metal, glass)**
- **Big or chunky wood material**
- **Waxed paper**
- **Glossy paper**
- **Ash from coal, wood or charcoal**
- **Plastic cotton swabs**
- **Synthetic fibers**
- **Weeds and invasive plants**
**HOW TO KNOW IT’S READY:**

**THE JAR TEST**

Put some compost in a jar, add water to make it soggy, and seal the jar tightly.

Leave it alone for a week, then open the jar carefully. Check for odor. If it smells like wet earth, then the compost is done.

Finished compost is dark brown or black and crumbly with a rich, earthy smell. Using compost in the late summer or fall is ideal so that you can make room in your compost bin for fall leaves.

**HOME COMPOSTING REBATE CHALLENGE:**

The City of Austin’s Home Composting Rebate Challenge is a rebate program challenging Austinites to do three things: downsize to a 32-gallon trash cart or smaller; take a free basic home composting class; and purchase a home composting system.

Austin Resource Recovery Curbside customers who do these three things are eligible for a rebate on a home composting system. The rebates are for 75 percent of the total cost of the composting system (taxes excluded) up to $75 in value.

**TROUBLESHOOTING:**

Composting is not an exact science. If you combine roughly one part of nitrogen-rich greens to three parts carbon-rich browns to your compost then you will be off to a good start.

Below are some common composting problems and how to fix them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SYMPTOM</th>
<th>PROBLEM</th>
<th>SOLUTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bad odor</td>
<td>Not enough air, too little browns</td>
<td>Turn/mix the compost and add more browns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pile smells OK, but is not decomposing</td>
<td>Not enough water, too little greens</td>
<td>Moisten pile, turn material and add more greens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liquid is leaking out of the bottom of the bin</td>
<td>Too much water. Materials should be damp like a wrung-out sponge</td>
<td>Add more of the dry browns and turn/mix the compost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compost not breaking down properly</td>
<td>Materials are too big</td>
<td>Cut materials into smaller pieces</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**MORE INFORMATION ON COMPOSTING**

Visit austintexas.gov/department/composting for more information on the following:

- City of Austin Home Composting Program
- Building Your Own Composter
- Worm Composting
- Mulching and Composting Application
- Compost Bin Newsletter
- Cornell Waste Management Institute

For the rebate application form and the class schedule, visit austirecycles.com