COMPOSTING

NATURE'S WAY OF RECYCLING

Composting is a natural process that breaks down organic materials into a dark, earthy, soil-like material. Putting compost on your lawn and garden adds nutrients to help plants grow.

AUSTIN RESOURCE RECOVERY
A CITY OF AUSTIN SERVICE

Learn more at:
austinrecycles.com

LET NATURE DO THE WORK FOR YOU

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.

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.

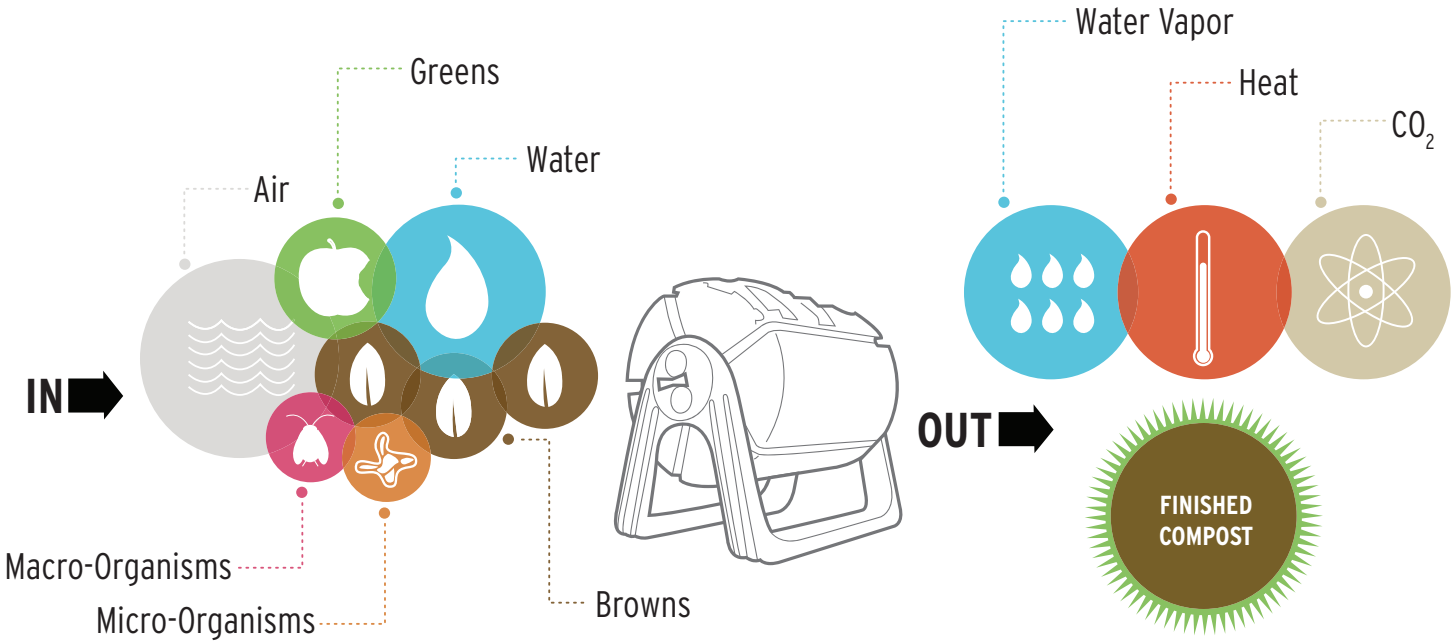
Add water and "turn" materials.

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 GET STARTED:

First decide if you want a compost pile (a small area of the yard where you mix your ingredients) or a fabricated compost bin or tumbler.

Generally, a bin or enclosed pile is recommended to discourage pests and make it easier to access the finished compost.

There are many commercially produced compost bins, or you can build your own from numerous plans available online.

The ideal bin size is 3 feet by 3 feet by 3 feet.

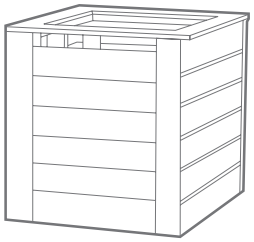


Fig. 1

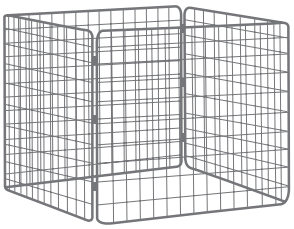


Fig. 2

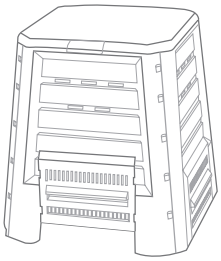


Fig. 3

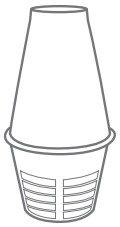


Fig. 4

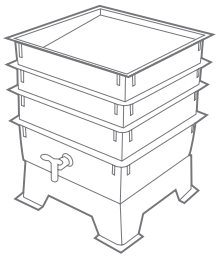


Fig. 5

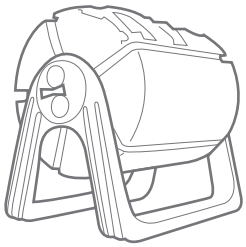


Fig. 6

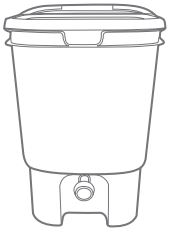
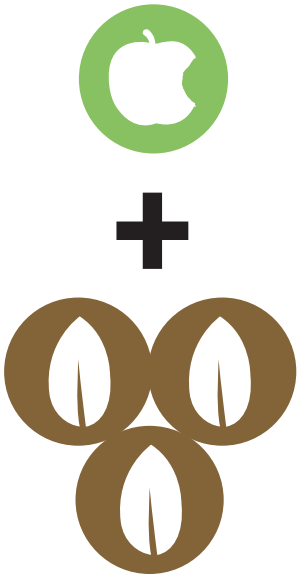


Fig. 7

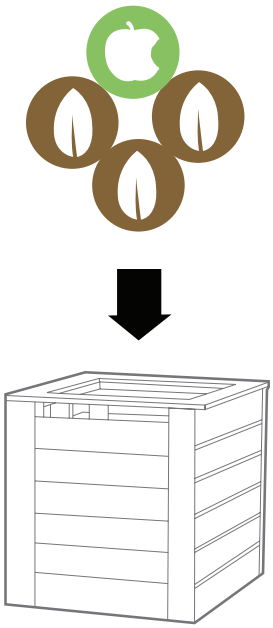
Fig. 1 Wooden
Fig. 2 Wire Composter
Fig. 3 Enclosed plastic bin
Fig. 4 Cone
Fig. 5 Vermi compost system
Fig. 6 Tumbler
Fig. 7 Indoor composter

HOW TO MAKE COMPOST:

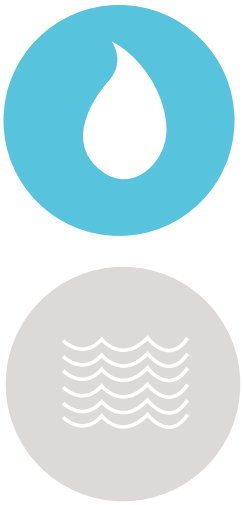
1. Each time you add materials to your pile, add roughly one share of nitrogen-rich greens and three shares of carbon-rich browns.



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

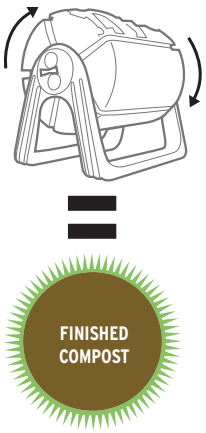


3. Add some water (ex. by rinsing out your kitchen compost collector) and mix. Make sure your pile has enough air and water. The mixture should not be more moist than a wrung out sponge.



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



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
	Old, dried up herbs, aquarium plants
WOOD CHIPS, STRAW AND HAY	Wooden toothpicks, sawdust, pencil shavings
PAPER	Paper bags, napkins, towels and tissues, newspapers, comics, tickets, cards, envelopes, receipts, paper notes, computer paper, junk mail, shredded paper, paperboard, cardboard
NATURAL FIBERS	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)
- Ash from coal, wood or charcoal
- Big or chunky wood material
- Waxed paper
- Glossy paper
- 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.

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

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.

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

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