Basic Method

Gather Brown material (see list below) or soil. Line bottom of the bin with ½ of this material. Place kitchen scraps (or other Green material) on top. Cover kitchen scraps with rest of Brown material. Keep adding layers of Brown on top of Green. Bottom layers will be finished between 12 to 18 months. For faster compost, chop materials into smaller pieces, add compost enhancer (found in stores) and/or move bin into the sun.

BROWN MATERIAL	GREEN MATERIAL	MATERIALS TO AVOID
✓Corn stalks/cobs ✓Dry grass clippings ✓Dry flowers/leaves ✓Leaf mould ✓Straw or hay ✓Sunflower hulls ✓Wood ash (small amounts) ✓Wood chips ✓Sawdust (not from plywood) ✓Shredded newsprint & cardboard (small amounts)	✓Coffee grounds/filters ✓Eggshells ✓Feathers ✓Flowers ✓Fresh grass clippings ✓Juicer pulp ✓Tea bags ✓Tea leaves ✓Hair (untreated) ✓Fruits/Veggies (chopped into small pieces) ✓Feces from herbivores (not cat/dog)	×Barbecue ashes/coal ×Dairy products ×Dishwater ×Grease, fat & oils ×Weeds with seeds ×Meat, fish, bones ×Cat/Dog feces ×Grains, breads, baked goods ×Materials treated with herbicide/pesticide

Lawn & Grass Tip

Leaving grass clippings in place after mowing, allowing them to decompose, will provide important nutrients for your lawn. A mulching lawn mower works best, but is not essential. If you choose to compost, use a sharp mower blade on dry grass.

How Do I Identify Finished Compost?

When finished, the material is dark, crumbly and has a fresh, earthy smell. It will no longer look like what you originally put into your bin. There may be some pieces of the original material in the compost; these materials just take longer to break down. Take these pieces out put them back into the compost bin to further decompose.

What Can I Do With Finished Compost?

In The Garden

Compost can be added to a garden any time throughout the year but the best times are in spring before planting or in fall after harvesting.

Work compost into soil to a depth of 6 inches (be careful not to harm bulbs or perennial roots) or dig trenches for seeds or seedlings, then add a handful of compost to the furrow for each plant.

Pots and Containers

Combine 1 part compost with 1 part potting soil for houseplants and flower boxes.

On the Lawn

Aerate the lawn in spring and rake in a 2 inch layer of compost. For patchy grass, work in compost, water the area and then plant grass seed.

As Top Dressing

Add compost as top dressing to potted plants, or underneath flowers, vegetables, shrubs and trees. For bigger trees, add a couple of inches of compost from the trunk out to the drip line (the end of the branches).

Compost Tea

Compost tea can be a "quick fix" for ailing plants. Stir together 1 part compost and 1 part water in a watering container. Leave mixture for a day or two and then use the water for your plants.

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A Beginner's Guide to

BACKYARD COMPOSTING

Why Should I Compost?

When we throw out kitchen and yard waste, it ends up in the local landfill where it can create methane gas and toxic leachate. Transporting organics to the landfill also produces air pollution from vehicles. These secondary processes fuel climate change and pollute water sources.

It is estimated that at least 30% of "garbage" can be composted. By composting, we return valuable nutrients to the soil. It replaces the need for commercial fertilizer and helps save water by improving soil water retention and reducing evaporation. It's great for the garden!

Visit the Fraser Valley Regional District Compost Demonstration Garden for the "Hows & Whys" of composting
33670 Valley Road in Abbotsford, next to the Recycling Depot.
Call 604-850-3551 for more information.

What is Composting?

In nature, organic material, such as leaf litter and woody debris, falls to the ground. This material provides food for soil microbes. These microbes break down material and, release valuable nutrients back into the soil. Existing plants and trees are then able to absorb and utilize these nutrients. This process is relatively slow in nature. Backyard composting is a means of speeding it up.

What Equipment Will I Need?

You will need a container with a lid to collect organic waste from your kitchen and transport it to your compost bin (an ice cream pail works well). Keep this covered container beside the sink and place all organic kitchen waste inside. When it is full, take it out to the compost bin. Make sure to wash the container after emptying it to prevent fruit fly infestations.

Compost Bin

You actually don't *need* a bin to compost. Some people just use a large pile in their backyard. But, a commercial bin makes for a neater, rodent resistant area and will generally provide for quicker decomposition. As well, they are readily available, compact and moderately priced. Whether you buy a bin or make your own, there are a few important things to consider.

Aeration Tool

To allow for proper decomposition of the organic waste, you will need to mix the material within your compost pile. Actual "aeration tools" are available in the stores but aren't essential. Something as simple as a shovel, pitchfork or broom handle will let you to turn over and poke holes in the compost pile,

Size

Optimum pile size is 3' wide x 3' long x 3' high. Commercial bins may differ as they are designed for smaller spaces.

Drainage and Air Flow

The bin should have holes or slots that allow air to flow into the pile. Also, the bottom should allow for the drainage of excess moisture.

Other Considerations

Also, consider accessibility, ease of setup, opening size for turning pile and if the bin itself is made of recyclable material.

Making Your Own Bin

If making your own bin, be creative! Combine different materials from around the house. You could use scrap wood, wooden pallets, a metal drum, cinder blocks, an old plastic garbage bin, or hardware cloth (wire mesh). Put it all together using hammer and nails, a staple gun, rope, string, wire, or screws.

- Construction plans for a wooden compost box are available at the FVRD. See contact info on back of brochure.
- To buy a bin, check garden or hardware centres or call your local municipal hall.
- Or try a **WORM COMPOSTER!** Ideal for small spaces. Check the internet for information.

Making Compost

Now the fun begins! There is no "one way" to compost, so don't be afraid to experiment. The best way to learn is simply by doing it.

Important Composting Ingredients:

There are 4 ingredients necessary for compost.

1. AIR: Aerobic bacteria require air to survive.
HINT: Aerate your pile weekly by turning or mixing the pile, or by poking holes in pile.

2. MOISTURE: Microorganisms require water.
HINT: Keep pile as wet as a wrung out sponge (40% to 60% moisture level).

3 & 4. BROWN AND GREEN MATERIAL

All organic material contains both carbon and nitrogen. The microbes in your compost pile require certain amounts of both to live and reproduce. Material high in carbon is considered a "Brown Material" and material high in nitrogen is considered a "Green Material". It is best to add a variety of both to the compost to achieve a good carbon-nitrogen balance.
HINT: Mix 1 part Brown material with 1 part Green material.

Compost Bin Considerations

Rodent Resistance

Make sure that rodents stay away from material in your bin. To avoid pests, exclude meat and fish from your compost pile, make sure that openings and vents are no greater than ½ inch and that all lids, vents, bottoms and doors are secured tightly or are lined with ½ inch wire mesh, known as hardware cloth.

COMMON COMPOSTING PROBLEMS

Problem	Possible Cause	Solutions
Smells, like rotten egg	Not enough air, pile too compacted, or too wet	Turn pile, mix in dry Brown material
Smells, like ammonia	Too much Green material	Mix in Brown material
Not breaking down	Pieces too big, pile too small/dry, not enough Green material	Chop material, make pile bigger, mix in Green material & water
Flies	Kitchen container not covered/cleaned, bin with no lid	Bury kitchen waste, keep container clean/covered
Pests	Wrong material, kitchen waste not buried, not rodent proof	No meat, bones, greasy food. Bury waste, make bin rodent proof
Pale green mould	Lack of oxygen	Turn pile
Lots of ants	Pile too dry	Add fresh kitchen waste or water