

How to Home Compost

What is composting?

Think of composting as organic recycling. Composting is a biological process that occurs when microorganisms, like bacteria and fungi, digest organic matter such as leaves, grass, and food scraps. The by-products of composting are heat, water vapor, and carbon dioxide, and at the end of the process you are left with a nutrient rich, soil-like substance called compost or humus. You can then use the compost on your lawn or garden to grow new plants and continue the organic recycling loop. When you are done with recyclable plastic bottles and aluminum cans, you throw them in the recycling bin. Now, when you are done with a compostable SunChips® bag, you can throw it in your compost bin!

Keys to Successful Hot, Active Composting

Composting generates heat as a by-product. The temperature and rate of degradation will vary depending on how you maintain your compost pile. The hotter the temperature of your compost pile, the faster the materials in your pile will decompose. The SunChips® compostable bag will break down in about 14 weeks if the compost temperature is maintained above ~130°F. If your compost pile does not get that hot, it's OK. The SunChips® compostable bag will still break down, it will just take longer.

Throughout this page, the most important home compost success tips will be marked with an *.

Step 1 – Choosing a Compost Bin

There are many different ways to compost at home, and it doesn't matter what size yard you have or if you live in an apartment.

A compost bin is like a backyard oven that holds in heat and moisture. There are two main types of bins used for composting that are commercially available: open-sided and enclosed. Both types will work, but you may find it easier to maintain the proper moisture level with an enclosed bin. You can also build your own bin or simply create a compost pile.

If you live in an apartment, there are small indoor composters commercially available. The NatureMill is one type that is easy to use and runs on a tiny amount of electricity.

*Our home compost research found that the bigger compost bins (21 cu. ft and up) = more efficient composting. One factor that affects the amount of heat generated during composting is the mass of organic materials available. Having a larger mass of organic materials will enable the pile to insulate itself and lose less heat from the surface, therefore increasing the rate of degradation.



Step 2 – Collecting Compost Materials

It's important to maintain a good mix of "green" and "brown" materials in your compost bin. Try to add about one part "green" for every three parts "brown." The reasoning behind this is to balance the carbon to nitrogen ratio to encourage microbial activity.

Greens

Fruit and veggie scraps
Grass
Fresh garden clippings and flowers
Green weeds

Browns

Dry leaves, small twigs
Straw/Hay
Sawdust
Paper
Soil, mulch, wood chips
Coffee, including the filter
SunChips® compostable bag

Thicker, more fibrous items will compost faster if they are cut into smaller pieces before placing in the bin.

*Before you start composting, make sure you have collected enough materials to fill your compost bin completely. Remember, the more organic material you have, the more heat will be generated and the faster you will create compost. The organic materials will "shrink" as they are breaking down and you will have room to add more to your bin.

Here is a recipe that's proven to work well by our composting expert:

1 part food scraps
2 parts leaves
2 parts grass
2 parts hay
1 part finished compost

When you are ready to start composting, place all the materials in your bin, mix them well, and add water so that the mix is damp to the touch.

Step 3 – Maintenance

The moisture level in your compost pile is another important variable for successful composting. Depending on the season and type of bin, you may need to water the compost several times a week.



*If you grab a handful from your compost pile it should always feel moist to the touch, but not soggy or dripping water. If your compost pile is too dry, add more greens and water. If it is too wet, add more browns.

*The microorganisms that are hard at work breaking down your organic materials require oxygen to thrive. By turning your compost pile at least once a week you will give them the air they need.

Continue adding new ingredients to your compost bin as you collect them. Try to keep the bin as full as possible.

Why should I compost?

Soil Benefits - Producing compost for your gardening needs is one good reason to start composting. Using compost as a soil conditioner reduces the need for chemical fertilizers. Compost increases nutrient and water retention in the soil, so you can water your garden less often. It also improves aeration and adds beneficial organisms to the soil.

Landfill Diversion – You can save money by adding common household and yard waste items to your compost bin instead of paying to send them to a landfill. The EPA states that 26% of the municipal waste stream going to landfills is organic material that can be composted.

How can I find a compost facility in my area?

Some communities in the US have municipal composting programs. Check with your local officials or go to www.findacomposter.com to see if one exists in your area.

How do I know if a plastic is compostable?

The most recognized program for industrial compostability certification for plastics in the US is through the Biodegradable Products Institute. Look for the BPI logo on products and also check out www.bpiworld.org to see a complete list of certified products.

What if I don't compost the bag, is it still better for the environment?

Although we would love for everyone to find a way to compost our bag, we understand that not everyone will have the resources to do it. However, please remember the bag is still very innovative.

