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Guide for domestic composting



WHAT IS COMPOST ?

Compost is a natural biological process, carried out under controlled conditions, which converts organic material into humus product called compost. Compost has the appearances of dark brown soil.

WHY MAKE COMPOST ?

Compost improves the physical, chemical and biological qualities of the soil, in doing so we will decrease domestic waste by 40% therefore reducing the pollution. In addition, compost can substitute the artificial fertilizers and can also be used for your vegetable, flower garden and your house plants or the lawn.

HOW TO MAKE COMPOST ?

Where to place your compost bin ?

- ⇒ Close to the house for easy access.
- ⇒ Near the garden hose to facilitate watering.
- ⇒ Well drained place (rather convex that concave).
- ⇒ Directly on the ground (never on concrete, asphalt or gravel).
- ⇒ Ensure a good air circulation around the compost bin.
- ⇒ In a semi shaded area.
- ⇒ Shelter to protect from wind (Will help preserve moisture in the compost pile).

If you are unable to follow all these steps the decomposition process will happen but at a slower rate.

How to start compost ?

1. Using a shovel loosen the ground to help create an ideal environment for the organisms in the soil to set to work decomposing everything as soon as the conditions are right. If there is grass on the spot, it is necessary to break and turn it over to have the soil facing up.
2. Install the compost bin.
3. Make a nest of 5 to 6 cm at the base of the bin directly on the ground using small twigs, sticks and hay or straw.
4. Deposit a layer of dead leaves or soil. The nest allows for better ventilation, constant moisture is required in the bin to avoid soil to harden.
5. Once the nest is ready, add kitchen refuse, fruit and vegetable leftovers. Kitchen waste must always be covered with brown material (leaves, straw or soil). If we are out of season for dead leaves use shredded newspapers.
6. Alternate wet and dry layers in order to achieve a good balance of carbon/nitrogen for a healthy composting. Making the pieces smaller will provide a faster decay process.
7. Approximately every twenty centimetres it is recommended to add an activator: soil, manure, commercial activator or compost from the previous year.
8. Every 2 or 3 weeks turn compost to aerate.
9. Keep wet to touch (The compost should be moist if too dry, add water, if so too wet, add dry materials).

How long before we obtain compost ?

- ⇒ The decomposition process will depend on the attention given. It can vary from three months up to three years.
- ⇒ In general, the material placed in the bin should provide useful compost for the next spring.

DID YOU KNOW ?

According to Recyc-Quebec, if composting makes it possible to generate a beneficial product for the environment, at the same time the decomposition of the organic matter creates a significant problem at landfill site.



When organic wastes in landfill sites become too compacted it creates anaerobic decomposition which produces carbon dioxide and methane gas. In addition acid leachate a highly black toxic liquid is produced by the combined effect of the decomposition of organic waste and the percolating of rainwater in the compacted layers of waste in the landfill sites.

The importance of composting instead of burying in landfill site makes sense.



The key for success is a good balance of the material used in your compost.

RICH IN NITROGEN MATTERS

(« Greens », wet matters)

- ⇒ Fruits
- ⇒ Garden refuse
- ⇒ Grass cutting (fresh)
- ⇒ Manure
- ⇒ Eggs shells (calcium)
- ⇒ Seaweed



RICH IN CARBON MATTERS

(« Brown », dry matters)

- ⇒ Trees leaves
- ⇒ Dried grass cutting
- ⇒ Dried straw/hay
- ⇒ Sawdust
- ⇒ Twigs
- ⇒ Coffee grounds (filter included)
- ⇒ Tea bags (bag included)
- ⇒ Paper (rather recycle)
- ⇒ Paper towel
- ⇒ Pasta
- ⇒ Bread
- ⇒ Rice
- ⇒ Nut shells
- ⇒ Fruit pits
- ⇒ Material (linen, wool, leather, cotton)
- ⇒ Hair, nails
- ⇒ Bird litter
- ⇒ Feathers
- ⇒ Dead plants and dried flowers
- ⇒ Soil (rich in minerals)



DO NOT COMPOST

- ⇒ Weeds
- ⇒ Wood ashes
- ⇒ Lime
- ⇒ BBQ Briquettes
- ⇒ Meat and fish scraps
- ⇒ Oil, grease, fat
- ⇒ Bones
- ⇒ Dairy product
- ⇒ Animals or human excrement (may contain pathogen)
- ⇒ Aspirator dust
- ⇒ Rhubarb leaves (the stem can be compost)
- ⇒ Materials contaminated with pesticides or dangerous products (ie treated wood)
- ⇒ Sick plant or foliage
- ⇒ Great quantity of sodden materials



COMPOSTING GUIDES

- ⇒ **Balance** between the quantities of materials rich in carbon and nitrogen.
- ⇒ **Two** (2) quantities of “brown” must be incorporated in the compost for one quantity of “greens” (Two for one rule)
- ⇒ **Alternate materials.** The more diversified the waste material the richer the compost will be.
- ⇒ **Smaller the materials,** faster the decomposition process.
- ⇒ **Air and Moisture.** The levels of moisture and air circulation are important elements in a compost bin. If too wet or not enough air it will slow the decomposition process.



SOLUTIONS TO SEVERAL PROBLEMS

PROBLEMS	Bad odours.
CAUSES	Not enough oxygen, or too wet.
SOLUTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ Mix up the pile so that it gets aeration and add materials rich in carbon to soak up excess moisture. ⇒ Reduce watering and protect from heavy rain.
PROBLEMS	Middle is dry.
CAUSES	Lack of water.
SOLUTION	Mix up the pile and water it.
PROBLEMS	Damp and warm only in the middle.
CAUSES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ Pile could be too small (if not in a bin). ⇒ Exposure to the sun. ⇒ Not enough nitrogen.
SOLUTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ Add more materials ensure that you have enough nitrogen sources and mix up. ⇒ Cover it with a hessian (if not in bin).
PROBLEMS	Attracts rodents, flies or other animals.
CAUSES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ Inappropriate materials (like meats, oils, bone), or the food-like material is too close to the surface of the pile. ⇒ Materials not recommended for compost.
SOLUTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ Bury kitchen scraps near the center of the pile or cover with leaves or mature compost. ⇒ Don't add inappropriate materials to compost.