

# Backyard Composting



Information about how you can produce garden "gold" from everyday items around your home

Butler County Department of Recycling & Waste Management

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## What Is Compost?

Mother Nature is currently in the process of recycling as you read this pamphlet. Through the natural process of decomposition, organic waste is converted into mulch which is used to fertilize and condition the soil.

## Why Should I Compost?

- Compost is an easy and inexpensive way to improve the health of soil and the plants grown in the soil.
- Composting preserves landfill space & natural resources and is a good, easy and inexpensive way to care for the environment.

## What Can I Compost?

You can compost many different kinds of biodegradable materials. Things you will most likely use are: **Leaves, Grass Clippings, Garden Residue, Weeds, Newspapers, Branches, Fruit/Vegetable Scraps, Coffee Grounds, Eggshells and Nutshells.**

Materials which should not generally be added to your compost include: meat, fish, poultry, dairy products, foods containing animal fats, pet waste, colored paper, weeds with developed seed heads, any plant infected with or susceptible to disease such as roses or peonies.

## What Do I Need to Compost?

### GOOD LOCATION

Your home compost pile should be located in a warm area and should be protected from overexposure to wind and too much direct sunlight.

### SHREDDED ORGANIC WASTE

Shredding, chopping and even bruising organic materials hastens decay. You should have at least 3 cubic feet of organic material to form a compost pile.

### NITROGEN

Nitrogen accelerates composting. Good sources of nitrogen include grass clippings, manure, bloodmeal and nitrogenous fertilizer.

### AIR & WATER

Your compost pile and its enclosure should be well ventilated. Some decay can occur without oxygen, but the process is slow and can cause odors. Materials in your compost pile should be kept moist like a squeezed sponge. Too little water or too much water slows the decomposition process. Over-watering can also cause odors and a loss of nutrients.

## Types of Compost Construction

### COMPOST PILES

For easy and efficient composting, yard wastes can simply be stacked into piles. Organic waste can easily be added to the pile as they are collected. It is not necessary to add soil, fertilizer or compost "starter" to a pile, as all the ingredients necessary for composting are already present in the organic waste.

### COMPOST BINS

A tidier composting method makes use of holding bins, which are simple structures that surround and confine compost piles. Bins can be constructed of wire mesh shaped into a ring or from wooden pallets lashed together to form a





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square. For more information on bin construction, call the Butler County Department of Recycling & Waste Management.

### BUILDING THE COMPOST

Choose a good, well-drained location. Gather your organic materials and layer them. Try to get a good mix of "browns" (leaves, straw, newspaper, wood chips, sawdust) and "greens" (grass clippings, vegetable waste, fruit waste, garden residue, manure). Start with a base of about 4 to 6 inches brush, wood chips or another porous material. This will allow air and soil organisms to enter the pile from below. Add 3 to 5 inches of "green" materials. A bit of soil may be added to more quickly introduce the soil microorganisms to your pile. Mix the layers. Pick up a handful of the material to check for moisture content. Just a few drops of water should come out. If dry, add water. Continue building alternate layers of "browns" and "greens", mixing and watering when needed, until the pile is 3 or 4 feet high. Once the pile is built, it should heat up within a day or two and will begin reducing in size. Periodically turn and mix the pile to introduce air and move materials from the outside of the pile to the middle. Add water when the pile is too dry. The more you turn the pile, the sooner you will have finished compost.



For more detailed information on composting, call the Butler Co. Dept. of Recycling & Waste Mgt. or search on the internet for the terms "backyard composting" or "back yard compost bin".

Compost can be used in three ways:

1. **Mulch:** Compost is a good mulch for all types of plants. It can be used in flower and vegetable gardens as well as around trees and shrubs. You can use compost in place of peat moss, bark nuggets, shredded bark and straw. When using as a mulch, spread compost around evenly in a layer 1 to 2 inches deep. It should be spread around trees and shrubs 3 to 4 inches deep. Never pile compost against the trunks and stems of plants.
2. **Soil Amendment:** Compost can be mixed with the soil before planting lawns, flower or vegetable gardens. It can be used like peat moss or mushroom manure to loosen heavy clay soils and to bind light sandy soils. Because compost is not a fertilizer, you may need to apply fertilizer as well.
3. **Potting Mix:** Compost can be used to make potting mixes for houseplants and planting boxes. Compost should be sifted to remove any large pieces that are not fully decayed. No more than 1/4 to 1/3, by volume, of the potting mix should be compost.

