

## Do It Yourself Composting

### How does composting work?

There are many variations in composting techniques, but the most common idea is to let the biological action of bacteria and fungi heat the interior of a compost pile to 150 degrees, killing weed seeds and disease organisms. The other method is called cold-composting – instead of using heat, you let worms do all the work. Cold composting needs less “turning” – no need to flip the pile every week, just be patient.

### Does it take a lot of room to compost?

You will need a place for a composting bin – this could be as large as a 4'x4' area (recommended if you're going to add a lot of yard or garden waste) or as small as 1'x1' (if you're just going to use it for kitchen scraps). Don't make it so big that you can't keep it half full all the time, or so small that you overfill it. Decide on what works best for you and your space.

### Does it smell? Will it attract pests?

Place your composting bin in a convenient place, but not too close to your garden. It can be closer to your back door than you might think though – if done right compost is odor-free and pest-free.

### What can I compost?

You can compost almost anything that is bio-degradable. Kitchen vegetable scraps, egg shells, moldy and stale bread, weeds, wilted flowers, cut grass, old mulch, straw, leaves, coffee grounds & filters, lint from your dryer, dust & pet hair from your vacuum cleaner, paper towels & napkins, even shredded bills and junk mail! The list of things you can't compost is easier to remember: no oils (like salad dressing or bacon grease), no meat or greases, and no sauces (spaghetti is fine, but no sauce or meatballs on top).

### How do I get started?

You can find a composting bin that suits your space and lifestyle at your favorite retailer or farm/garden supply store. For the do-it-yourselfer here are 3 easy-to-construct weekend project designs, just remember they all need to be 4 feet tall, kept moist in the dry season, and layered alternately with green then brown materials (e.g. grass / old leaves).

- **Sunken garbage can** makes a convenient compost bin when space is limited. Punch/drill holes in the bottom of the can for drainage, place it in a hole, insert a perforated drain pipe (PVC) in the center for aeration, and fill it with alternating layers of material. Screening on top keeps out insects and scavengers.
- **Screened square compost bin** out of chicken wire and light lumber. Build a 4x4x4 square out of 1x2 lumber. Create two L-shaped sections fastened with hooks and eyes. Fill to the rim, stir weekly (for faster results), and keep moist during the dry season. Unfasten the hooks & eyes when ready to use in the garden – compost will remain solid when the side is opened.
- **Wire mesh cylinder** out of welded wire is one of the simplest of all compost bins to construct. Use mesh with heavy gauge (welded) wire; support with stakes driven into the ground in a circular shape. Often used for autumn leaves, it can handle any type of compost.