

## Backyard Composting: Frequently Asked Questions

1. How is organic material decomposing in a compost bin better than organic material decomposing in the landfill?
  - a. Waste buried in a landfill undergoes anaerobic decomposition, meaning that the buried waste does not receive oxygen. Without oxygen, methane is produced, a gas that has 21 times the global warming potential of Carbon Dioxide. However, organic materials that are decomposing in a compost bin undergo aerobic decomposition, because they are exposed to oxygen, by the microorganisms helping to break down the material and by aerating the bin contents. During an aerobic process, Carbon Dioxide is produced instead of methane. This is why it is important to make sure your compost bin gets enough aeration, both to speed up decomposition and reduce the chance of producing methane. Bonus: You get a nutritious supplement for your garden!
2. What are good “browns” to add to my compost bin?
  - Leaves
  - Sawdust or wood shavings
  - Shredded newspaper
  - Cut-up toilet paper/paper towel rolls
  - Unsoiled Paper towels
  - Paper egg cartons
  - Tissue paper (for wrapping use)
  - Paper bags
3. How do I help my compost to decompose faster?
  - a. The best way to increase the speed of decomposition in your composter is to chop up your fruit/veggie scraps and other materials into small pieces before putting them in the bin.
  - b. Be sure to always layer “browns” and “greens”. Try to maintain a 50/50 balance (by weight) between the two. Since greens are typically heavier than browns, try to add 2-3 buckets of browns for every bucket of greens. To balance moisture content of the bin.
  - c. Maintain the moisture level of your compost bin, which should ideally be like a wrung out cloth. If your compost seems to dry, add some water from the hose and mix the compost with your mixing tool, broom handle or pitchfork. If the compost seems too wet, add more browns.
4. How do I prevent bears from being attracted to my compost?
  - a. Remove any potential bear attractants from your property. This includes fallen apples, stinky garbage, dirty barbeques, bird feeders and pet food. Bears may be attracted to these first, and then discover the compost bin.
  - b. Make sure you are not adding meat, dairy products or greasy foods to your bin.
  - c. Every time you add food scraps to the bin, be sure to cover them with a layer of leaves, soil or other brown material to eliminate the smell.

- d. Aerate your compost after each addition of food scraps and brown material. Add an additional layer of brown material on top.
5. My compost bin is full of ants! How do I get rid of them?
    - a. Typically, large numbers of ants indicate that the compost pile is too dry. To help encourage the ants to leave the bin, spray water on the top of the pile and stir it in with a pitchfork to disturb the ant colonies.
    - b. If there are still ants in your bin, don't worry too much. Ants benefit the composting process by transporting useful organisms and nutrients to different areas of the compost.
  6. How do I get rid of all of the tiny flies buzzing over my compost bin?
    - a. To control flies, cover your food scraps with a light layer of soil, followed by a thicker layer of brown material (leaves, straw or shredded newspaper works well).
  7. How do I keep my kitchen compost pail from smelling?
    - a. You can reduce the mess and smell of your compost pail by doing the following:
      - Wash the pail regularly to help eliminate odours
      - Using a few sheets of newspaper, line your compost pail. The newspaper will soak up extra liquids and make cleaning your pail a breeze. The newspaper also counts as a "brown" material to your compost bin.
      - When peeling vegetables, peel them onto a sheet of newspaper, then crumple it up and put it in the kitchen compost pail.
      - Use a pail with a charcoal filter in the lid. The filter is very effective at reducing odours.
  8. What should I do when my compost bin is almost full?
    - a. Even though the contents keep shrinking down, once the composting materials reach to within 10 cm of the top of the bin, it is time to stop adding fresh materials. At this time you may either begin removing finished compost through the sliding door at the base of the bin, or leave this compost bin alone (aerating every 2-4 weeks) and set up a new one to start filling.

### **Composting Tips**

- Make a habit of adding browns whenever you add food scraps to the pile.
- Mix the pile every 10-14 days to aerate and help the compost heat up. If the pile gets too dense with food scraps, it will smell bad and composting will slow down or stop completely.
- Avoid adding oils, fats bread products, rice/pasta, sauces, meat, fish or dairy products to your compost bin. These will cause odour problems and attract animals and other pests.
- Do not add dog or cat feces or kitty litter to your compost bin. They may contain diseases or unwanted chemicals.
- Do not add weeds to your compost bin. The seeds may live on in your compost and be transferred to your garden when your compost has finished decomposing.