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Making Compost Using a Stationary Plastic Compost Bin



Photo with permission from Jeff Brown, Brandbuilders, LLC

Congratulations on Your Compost Bin Purchase!

In order to successfully make compost with your new bin, read and follow the instructions that come with the bin. In particular, it is strongly recommended that you maintain the proper ratio of “brown” to “green” ingredients. Whenever you put a load of “greens”, such as food scraps, plant debris, or herbicide-free, fresh grass clippings into the bin, add about 2 or 3 times the volume of “browns”, such as shredded or torn (non-glossy) newsprint or cardboard, dried leaves, sawdust or even purchased wood shavings, like the kind used for small animal bedding. By doing this, you will not only avoid getting a gooeey mess of those food scraps and the attention of uninvited critters, but also a well-balanced compost product in a shorter period of time that will be excellent for conditioning the soil in your vegetable garden, ornamental beds, lawns or potted plants.

Here are some other helpful hints to successfully make compost with your new bin:

- Round or square plastic bins are most suited for composting food wastes rather than yard wastes because of their small size. Use of small amounts of yard waste are recommended but a second bin or separate pile may be required if large amounts of yard waste are to be composted.
- Locate your bin on level ground in a well-drained area that is convenient to access year-round.
- It is important to turn your compost mixture to aerate it. Once a month is usually sufficient with plastic compost bins. Since there may be limited space to turn the

mixture in the bin with a pitchfork or shovel, you can use a “winged compost aerator” that can be bought either online, at your local hardware or big box store.

- Use the “lasagna” method of adding ingredients by layering your browns and greens, starting with the ratios mentioned above. Adding a few sticks or larger wood chips to the bottom and then occasionally as you layer will also help provide some aeration to speed up the process.
- For fastest decomposition (6 to 12 months), all materials should be in pieces no bigger than 3 or 4 inches in size.
- If you are using leaves, chop or shred them before putting them into the bin, if possible. This will help speed up the decomposition process.
- Occasionally add water to keep the mixture moist. The mixture should be about the same moistness as a wrung-out sponge.
- When your bin is full, continue to turn monthly until most of the materials you added to the pile are no longer recognizable. Typically, the volume will be reduced by about half. Finished compost should be brown and crumbly with a pleasant earthy odor.
- To empty the bin, make a space next to it, lift the bin up and off the pile and move it to the empty space.
- Now empty, another pile can be started in the bin. The finished pile, now exposed, will sit in a nice column until you’re ready to use it. Screen out the sticks and other ingredients that did not decompose and add them back in to the bin.
- If just a small amount of compost is needed, plastic composters typically have a small door at the bottom where you can remove a shovelful of compost at a time.
- Finished compost can be incorporated into garden soils or used to topdress ornamental plantings or lawn.
- Keep in mind that compost can change the pH and nutrients levels of your soil so consider testing the soil a few weeks after compost is added.
- Have all your tools and components close at hand, such as a food scrap bucket, a pile of leaves or other brown ingredients like the bedding material, a watering can, and a winged aerator or other tool to turn the compost mixture.
- Food scraps can continue to be added all winter and covered with a handful of leaves or shredded paper. A thicker top layer of leaves or wood shavings serves as a blanket over your pile during the colder winter months.

Learn as you go, find out what works best for you, and have fun experimenting. There is no perfect way of making compost, so don’t give up! You will be doing our earth, your community, and your gardens a favor by helping to do what nature intended.

By UConn Master Composters, Dan Martens, Marc Warren, Denise Arturi & UConn Associate Extension Educator, Dawn Pettinelli 2021

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