

Compost problems?

Most common problems will be solved by adding brown materials such as leaves, grass clippings and straw, which will balance moisture, eliminate odour, and discourage flies.

Symptom	Diagnosis	Treatment
Bin has a bad odour.	Not enough air; pile is too wet.	Turn pile. Add coarse dry materials such as dry leaves, straw or any brown material.
Pile is dry throughout.	Not enough water.	Turn and add water to moisten materials. Add fresh waste.
Compost material is damp and warm only in the middle.	Not enough green and brown material in the bin.	Collect more material and mix the new ingredients into the old.
Pests and other nuisance wildlife around bin.	Improper food trimmings added, or materials not covered well enough.	Do not add meat, fats, bones or animal waste. Use an animal-resistant compost bin.
Flies at compost bin.	Food scraps not covered. Not enough brown material.	Cover with soil, do not add food waste until problem is resolved.
Fruit flies in kitchen.	Scraps are attracting fruit flies.	Try storing in a different location such as the refrigerator or freezer.

Questions?

Call the Regional Compost Hotline at 604-736-2250.

How to use your compost:

- **Feed your lawn:**
Rake a layer of compost onto your lawn, about 5 mm (¼") thick.
- **Use it in your garden:**
Spread it around the base of shrubs, trees and perennials.
- **Make potting soil:**
1/3 sifted compost
1/3 soil
1/3 vermiculite
- **Have a small garden?**
Share it with your neighbours or the garden in your complex.



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Composting replicates nature's way of breaking down vegetation using good bacteria and other organisms.

Five reasons to compost

1. Reduce organic waste

From soil to food and back again. Reduce your ecological footprint by returning the nutrients in food scraps to your garden to nourish the soil—all at your own home.

2. Save time and money

You won't need to buy and haul compost with a closed loop composting system within your home.

3. Boost your garden

Applying compost will improve soil health and reduce the need for chemical fertilizers to achieve a blooming garden.

4. Help the environment

Compost enhances the ability of soil to retain water and decreases run off, which can pollute water systems by carrying soil, fertilizers and pesticides to nearby streams.

5. It's easy

Setting up a composter in your household is simple and inexpensive. Everyone in the home can participate and feel good about making a difference.

Additional Resources

Visit www.growgreenguide.ca for great ideas and practical solutions for healthy, sustainable lawns and gardens.

This publication is available online as a PDF

Search 'Backyard Composting' or its partner brochure, 'Worm Composting' at metrovancover.org

Call the Regional Compost Hotline at 604-736-2250

For more tips on food scraps recycling, visit metrovancover.org/foodscraps

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Together we make our region strong

metrovancover | SOLID WASTE



Here's the Dirt Backyard Composting

Find out how easy it is —
we can show you how!

A simple, inexpensive way to enhance your garden soil and benefit the environment.

Backyard Composting: 10 easy steps

1. **Choose** a flat area with good drainage.
2. **Purchase a bin** from your municipality, Compost Hotline, a store, or build your own animal-resistant compost bin. A lid on your bin will help keep out rain and animals.

tip The ideal compost bin size is one cubic metre in order to retain the heat it generates.

3. **Create a 6–10 cm base layer** using straw, leaves, or woody, brushy material to promote air circulation.
4. **Alternate layers** of green (nitrogen-rich) and brown (carbon-rich) materials. See the chart for a list of acceptable and unacceptable materials.

tip Chop up large materials for faster decomposition.

5. **Whenever you add a food scrap layer**, top it off with a layer of brown material (5–8 cm). Alternating green and brown material will promote a healthy compost.

tip In the fall, collect dry leaves into containers so that you can use them year-round.



6. **Mix bin contents** every week or two. This aerates the materials and gets the bin heating up again, allowing them to decompose faster. Purchase an aerator tool or use a pitchfork or shovel.
7. **Moisture content** of the material in the bin should be like a wrung-out dish sponge. Only add water if it is very dry after mixing.

tip To maintain proper moisture content, balance the amount of green and brown materials.

8. **Pile will shrink.** Continue to add layers of green and brown materials until bin is almost full.
9. **Compost is generally ready to use** after about 6–8 months.

tip If you have room, set up two composters so you can add to one bin as the other one matures.

10. **Harvest** your compost when the compost at the bottom and centre is decomposed and moist. Dig out the compost with a shovel, using the door at the bottom of a commercial bin and dig the compost from the centre.

tip You may choose to sift your compost through a mesh screen to remove large chunks or unfinished material.



How to find your compost bin

Contact the Compost Hotline or your municipality to see if there is a compost bin available to you. To construct your own animal-resistant bin, visit metrovancover.org and search "compost bin construction".

Discourage animals

A compost pile can become a home and food source for animals. Discourage them by composting only the appropriate food scraps (see chart), burying food scraps in existing material, and using an animal-resistant compost bin.



Compost responsibly

Please don't dump your compost materials in nearby parks or natural areas. Instead of naturally breaking down into soil, dumped compost can cause problems with pests, invasive plant species, and soil erosion.



What to compost:

Green material (nitrogen-rich)		
✓	Kitchen scraps	Vegetable and fruit material. Note: No salad dressing.
✓	Coffee grounds and tea leaves	Separate grounds and leaves from the filters and bags, as some are made of plastic. Do not put these in your compost.
✓	Plant trimmings from your garden	Leaves, old flowers, and end-of-season greenery.
✓	Grass clippings (fresh)	Best used as a mulch on your lawn; not from lawns recently treated with pesticides.
✓	Large leafy weeds	Use green leaves, not once in seed. Avoid invasive weeds. More information can be found in Metro Vancouver's Grow Green Guide (growgreenguide.ca).
✓	Rhubarb leaves	Safe for composting. Note: contains a natural chemical, oxalate, making leaves (NOT stems) poisonous to eat in large amounts.
✓	Pet manure	Use only from grass eaters such as rabbits, gerbils, guinea pigs, sheep, horses or cows.
Brown material (carbon-rich)		
✓	Leaves	Save leaves from the fall in a dry bin. Note: Oak leaves are good, but they decompose slowly, so use sparingly. Coniferous needles are not a source of brown material.
✓	Straw	Excellent carbon source; can use in place of leaves.
✓	Paper towels and napkins	
✓	Newsprint	Place into paper recycling but are safe in the compost if other brown material isn't available. Cut, shred or tear into smaller pieces for best results. Avoid international newsprint as inks may not be safe for compost.
✓	Cardboard	
✓	Brown kraft paper bags	
Other acceptable materials		
✓	Eggshells	Rinse and crush.
Materials for municipal green bins		
✓	Small amounts of fats, oils and grease; cooked food including rice or pasta	Attracts animals and pests. Composts very slowly. Can cause odour problems.
✓	Fish, meat, bones	Attracts animals. Can cause odour problems.
✓	Woody, brushy material	Includes corn cobs and stalks as these are larger and better suited for industrial composting.
Unacceptable Materials for compost or green bins (for garbage bins)		
✗	Dog or cat feces*	Meat-eating animals can carry disease.
✗	Kitty litter	May contain chemicals and disease organisms.
✗	Barbecue ash, coal	Contains chemicals such as sulphur oxides.
✗	Plastics (includes those labelled "compostable" or "biodegradable")	These materials are typically designed to break down at high temperatures, which are not achieved in backyard composting. Leave them out of your composter and green bins, unless specifically allowed by your municipality or service provider.

*Note: Dog feces can be composted in a separate container, keeping it out of the garbage. Curious? Go to metrovancover.org and search "compost dog waste".