

## HOW TO USE COMPOST



Compost is ready to use when the materials are reduced to a dark, rich humus. If some larger pieces are not decomposed, you can sift those out and use them to start a new batch. Compost can be

added to the soil at any time to help keep plants healthy. It improves soil structure, holds moisture, provides plant nutrients, and introduces beneficial organisms into the soil. Here are the most common ways to use compost.

### SOIL AMENDING

Compost can be used to enrich garden soils before planting. Mix 4-6 inches of compost into newly reclaimed or poor soils. Mix 1-3 inches into annual garden beds each year, or into soil under and around new trees and shrubs before planting.



### MULCHING

By spreading 2 to 3 inches of compost over the soil around plants, trees, shrubs and exposed slopes, gardeners and landscapers suppress weeds, keep plant roots cool and moist, conserve water, maintain a loose and porous surface, and prevent soil erosion.

### POTTING MIX

A potting mix can be made by mixing one part sand, two parts compost and one part soil. Be sure compost is fully decomposed (black and crumbly) before using it.



## COMPOST TROUBLESHOOTING

SYMPTOMS	PROBLEMS	SOLUTIONS
Pile not composting	Too dry	Add water until damp as a wrung-out sponge
	Too much dry, woody material (lack of Nitrogen)	Turn, add fresh green materials or organic nitrogen fertilizer (manure)
Pile smells rotten and/or attracts flies	Pile is too wet, or compacted	Turn, add dry materials
	Non-compostables present	Remove meat, grease, etc. and turn
Pile smells like ammonia (sharp odor)	Too much green material (or food wastes)	Turn to get more oxygen in pile, add dry or woody materials
Rodents in pile	Food wastes in open bin, holes larger than 1/4 inch	Turn compost and rodent-proof your bin by making sure there are no holes larger than 1/4 inch
	Non-compostables present	Remove meat, grease, etc. and turn
Low pile temperature	Pile is too small (less than 3x3x3)	Collect more materials and mix the new with the old; cover top, insulate sides

## COMPOSTING RESOURCES

Contact your county's cooperative extension service for more tips on composting and additional resources.

You may also visit one of the statewide home composting demonstration sites where various composting methods are displayed and additional information is available. Contact the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) at the address below for site locations. You may also contact DCA for information on training and starting a local home composting program. A list of videos, books and manufacturers is also available.

Georgia Department of Community Affairs  
Home Composting Program  
60 Executive Park South  
Atlanta, GA 30329  
(404) 679-4940  
[www.dca.state.ga.us](http://www.dca.state.ga.us)

# COMPOSTING AT HOME IN GEORGIA



*Turning Garbage Into Gold*

GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF  
COMMUNITY AFFAIRS  
HOME COMPOSTING PROGRAM

## WHY COMPOST?

Composting is an easy way to transform your landscape trimmings and your fruit and vegetable kitchen scraps into a dark, crumbly, sweet-smelling soil amendment. Gardeners refer to composting as "turning your garbage into gold" because it saves landfill space, conserves natural resources, and improves soil quality.

In Georgia, yard trimmings have been banned from landfills since 1996. Organic wastes such as yard trimmings and kitchen scraps represent about 36% of our waste stream. Recycling organic waste is a natural way to reduce the amount of waste going to landfills and conserve natural resources. *Composting is Recycling*, it:

- ✦ **Saves you money** by lowering garbage bills and replacing the need for commercial soil amendments.
- ✦ **Helps your garden and container plants** by improving the fertility and health of your soil.
- ✦ **Saves water** by helping the soil hold moisture and reducing water runoff.
- ✦ **Benefits the environment** by recycling valuable organic resources and reducing the use of fuel to transport yard trimmings off-site and process them on a large scale.

## WHAT CAN YOU COMPOST?

### DO COMPOST

Grass Clippings  
Leaves  
Shrub Prunings (chopped)  
Flowers  
Weeds  
Sawdust  
Hair  
Fruit and vegetable scraps  
Coffee grounds/tea bags  
Small amounts of uncoated paper

### DO NOT COMPOST

Meat  
Bones  
Dairy Products  
Fish  
Greasy Foods  
Dog and cat feces  
Unchopped, woody wastes  
Diseased plants  
Coated paper

## COMPOST STRUCTURES

### FROM NO TECH TO HIGH TECH

Heaps, hoops, bins, buckets, and worm boxes can help fit your composting operation into small spaces. Choose a structure that is the right size, style, cost, and effort level for you. Remember to use recycled materials or containers when constructing your compost bin.

**HEAPS** are the least organized way to compost, but also require the least effort. Simply pile your yard waste and let it sit. If you choose to turn it once in a while it will decompose faster. Otherwise just leave it and in one to two years it will turn to compost.

**HOOPS** (usually made from chicken or hog wire) are easy, fairly inexpensive to build, and help keep your compost pile tidy. Secure the hoop with hooks or twists of wire. To speed composting, undo the hoop, set it up next to the pile, and turn the pile back into the cage in its new location.



**BINS** neatly contain yard trimmings, and when made rodent-proof, work well for composting food wastes. Build with recycled wood, wire, or other materials for an inexpensive and attractive structure. Many styles are also commercially available.



**BUCKETS** are the apartment-dweller's answer to composting food wastes indoors or out. Used 5 gallon buckets with sealable lids can be obtained free from many grocery stores and



restaurants. Stir the compost-soil mixture to aerate it once or twice a week. Be sure to fill your buckets only half-full for easy stirring.

**WORM BOXES** can be used to compost food wastes indoors or outdoors. They are very convenient for small spaces and they give off little odor. Worms typically eat their own weight in kitchen scraps per day, but are picky eaters. They don't eat yard trimmings – only fruit and vegetable trimmings. Worm boxes can be made at home or purchased at the store. The most important thing to remember is to allow for plenty of holes to provide the worms adequate air to breathe.



## BASIC COMPOST RECIPE

The bugs, fungi, bacteria, and worms in your yard or worm box do most of the composting for you. The basic recipe for composting is to:

1. **CHOP** compostables. The more you chop, the faster the decomposition process will take place.
2. **MIX** two-thirds dry brown material (leaves, straw, shredded wood) with one-third moist, green materials for a balance of nutrients, air and water.
3. **ADD** water as you build your pile and maintain its moisture level so your pile is as damp as a wrung-out sponge. Proper moisture is essential for organisms to break down organic materials into compost.

## COMPOSTING METHODS

### No FUSS COMPOST

This is the easiest way to compost yard trimmings.

**Ingredients:**  
*Yard trimmings, water as needed*

- Directions:**
1. In a heap, hoop, or bin, layer your chopped yard trimmings as they accumulate.

2. Water so compost is kept as moist as a wrung-out sponge.

In 12 to 18 months, the material at the bottom and center of the pile will be a dark, crumbly compost. Sift, and use the uncomposted material to start a new batch. **Note:** Covering your bin or pile helps control its moisture content by either retaining moisture during hot summer months or repelling water during rainy months.

### FAST COMPOST

The fastest way to compost is to build a "hot" heap, hoop or bin. This requires frequent turning of the pile to get plenty of oxygen to the organisms that are hard at work, breaking down the materials and creating heat. Temperatures can reach 120-150° F when "fast" composting is taking place and this assures that weed seeds and pathogens are killed. For accurate temperature readings, use an extended-length thermometer which can be bought at your home garden center.

**Ingredients:**  
*Yard trimmings, fruit and vegetable trimmings, and water as needed*

- Directions:**
1. Layer and mix fresh green with dry brown materials alternately until you have at least a cubic yard (3' x 3' x 3') pile.
  2. Keep pile as moist as a wrung-out sponge.
  3. Cover the pile with a sheet of plastic, a piece of carpet, or a 1" layer of soil.
  4. Turn the pile one to three times a week to give it the air it needs for fast composting.

The compost is ready to use when it has degraded into a rich dark humus. Sift and use undecomposed material to start a new pile. The compost should be ready in 1-3 months.

### BUCKET COMPOST

This is the most compact way to compost kitchen scraps; do it in a 5 gallon bucket.

**Ingredients:**  
*Kitchen scraps, dry material (soil, sawdust, peat moss, straw)*

- Directions:**
1. Chop kitchen scraps and mix an equal amount of dry material at least once a week using a trowel or small spade. If too wet, stir in more dry material.
  2. Stir thoroughly each time you add materials.
  3. When bucket is 3/4 full, let stand 1-3 months, mixing it every week or two.



Use finished compost in garden or planters as it is produced.

### WORM COMPOST (Vermicomposting)

Worm composting is a fun way to turn fruit and vegetable trimmings into a rich fertilizer and soil amendment. This is a popular form of composting for school projects or people with no yards.

**Ingredients:**  
*Fruit and vegetable trimmings, newspapers, and red worms*  
*To start, use a 2:1 worms to food weight ratio (e.g., 2 lbs. worms to 1 lb. food waste)*

- Directions:**
1. Shred and moisten old newspapers and layer them 6" deep in a well-ventilated plastic or wooden box. Use black and white pages of the newspaper only.
  2. Add worms and begin feeding them your kitchen scraps (no meat products).
  3. Add fresh food waste as it becomes available.



Worm compost can be harvested in 3-6 months. The compost may be harvested by moving it all to one side of the bin and adding fresh bedding to the empty side. Then begin burying new food waste in the new bedding. The worms will migrate to the fresh bedding, allowing you to harvest the compost they produced.