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# COME, POST YOUR COMPOST: THE GUIDE

A FRIENDLY HANDBOOK TO COMPOSTING WITH THE  
TENNESSEE ENVIRONMENTAL COUNCIL



Department of  
**Environment &  
Conservation**



TENNESSEE  
ENVIRONMENTAL  
COUNCIL



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## COME POST YOUR COMPOST

Through our Come, Post Your Compost campaign, the Tennessee Environmental Council will serve as a central resource for food waste reduction across Tennessee by helping residents keep tons of food and yard waste out of our landfills and put it back into our community's hands and gardens

We hope to engage at least 1,000 Tennessee residents, throughout all 95 counties, in diverting 60 tons of food waste from Tennessee's landfills by December 2019. We'll help you get started by offering compost supplies upon registration, and we will reward participants at random and hold inter-county composting competitions.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Food represents the single largest occupant in U.S. landfills, yet only 3% of it is composted.

- Getting food to our tables...
  - Eats up 10% of total U.S. energy budget\*
  - Uses 50% of U.S. land\*
  - Swallows 80% of freshwater consumed in the U.S.

### YET

- Up to 40% of food in the U.S. today goes uneaten\*
  - Averaging about 20 lbs wasted per person every month\* Hitting an estimated \$165 billion a year thrown out
  - If that's not enough...
    - 1 in 8 Americans face food insecurity



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# HOW DO I START COMPOSTING?

Composting is easier than it looks (and more fun).

Composting is a great way to divert your food waste from the landfill and repurpose it as a good source of nutrients for your garden.

In order to get started with your composting adventure, follow these steps below:

## 1 CHOOSE YOUR SPOT

Whether you are using a bin or making a pile, place your compost in a sunny area. Sunlight will help jumpstart your compost pile by providing additional heat and energy.

## 2 CHOOSE/BUILD YOUR CONTAINER

There are many different ways to store your compost--if you aren't creating an open backyard pile, you can either buy a compost bin or make your own! If you decide to build one, avoid using treated wood as it can lead to harmful chemicals leaching into your compost.

## 3 CREATE BASE FOR PILE

Start off with a base layer of sticks and twigs--this will help by providing proper drainage and aeration. Cover the base layer with other brown material such as dried leaves and wood shavings. Adding garden soil will also help introduce worms and other critters to the pile--which will help speed up the decomposition process!

## 4 LAYER UP!

Continue to build your compost pile with layers that alternate between green (food scraps, grass clippings, etc.) and brown (dried leaves, shredded paper, cardboard, etc.) materials. This will help create more heat, which will in turn speed up the process! Adding worms (red wigglers are the best!) will also help speed up the composting process!

## 5 BE PATIENT

Compost takes time--Let nature take its course! The pile will gradually start to sink down as the material decomposes. Continue to add new material and remember to cover food waste with dried leaves and plant scraps to keep away flies and animals.

## 6 FEED YOUR GARDEN!

Harvest compost from the bottom of the pile--you don't need to wait until the entire pile turns into dirt! Compost is ready for use when it looks like mulch or soil. Spread it around your plants or mix in with soil at any time of the year!

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## "GREENS" VS. "BROWNS"

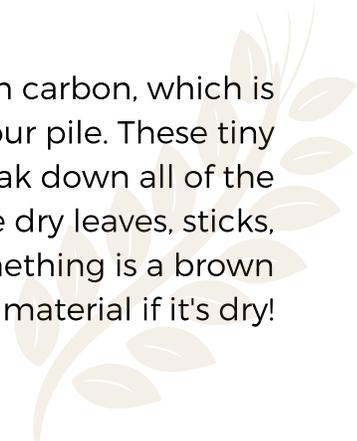
Compost is made of two types of materials: browns and greens. Having a good balance between these materials is a great way to ensure that you have a happy and healthy compost pile! Mixing green and brown materials will help produce more heat in your pile, which will make your compost rot faster. While composting might seem like a strange and mysterious process, it is no environmental magic! Rather, composting is carried out by the millions of microorganisms that call your compost pile home!

### WHAT IS "GREEN" MATERIAL?



Green materials are your compost ingredients that are high in nitrogen, which helps the microorganisms grow and develop. These ingredients are also what will help add moisture to your pile, which will also help the compost rot faster. Some examples of green material include food scraps, grass and shrubbery clippings, and fresh plant parts.

### WHAT IS "BROWN" MATERIAL?



Brown materials are your compost ingredients that are high in carbon, which is essential in providing energy for the microorganisms in your pile. These tiny creatures are hard workers and need the energy to break down all of the organic matter in your compost pile. Brown materials include dry leaves, sticks, and most paper products (shredded). You can tell that something is a brown material if it's dry!

### MAINTAINING A BALANCED PILE

Maintaining a proper balance between your brown and green materials is a great way to sustain a healthy compost pile. If you are unsure of how to balance your pile, try going with a 1:4 green-to-brown ratio: that is, for every 1 unit of green material you put to your pile, try putting 4 equal units of brown material to your pile.

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# WHAT (AND WHAT NOT) TO COMPOST

## GREENS

### *From the kitchen:*

- Fruit & vegetable scraps (incl. peels, cores, and rinds)
- Coffee grounds
- Loose leaf tea
- Stale breads, pastas, rice, tortillas, pita, chips, crackers, & cereal (avoid super processed foods)
- Cooked rice & pasta (without oil or butter)
- Spoiled pasta sauce & tomato paste
- Spoiled tofu
- Popcorn kernels
- Old herbs & spices
- Stale pumpkin, sunflower, & sesame seeds (chopped up)
- Old jelly/jam
- Stale beer & wine
- Seaweed

### *From the yard/around the house:*

- Fresh grass clippings (avoid anything that "weeds" or has been treated w/chemicals)
- Fresh leaves
- Fresh flower clippings
- Fresh shrub clippings (avoid diseased or infested plants)
- Fresh houseplant clippings
- Jack-o-lanterns

### *Animal-related:*

- Droppings from herbivorous pets (DO NOT compost cat or dog poop)
- Farm animal manure

## DO NOT COMPOST

- Meats, fish, dairy, bones, fats, oils or any other animal byproducts in your backyard compost pile (attracts rodents)
- Cat or dog poop
- plant pieces that have been exposed/treated with chemicals
- Diseased/infested plants
- Heavily inked paper products

*When in doubt, leave it out!*

## BROWNS

### *From the kitchen:*

- Egg shells (crushed)
- Tea bags (not synthetically made)
- Coffee filters (not synthetically made)
- Used paper napkins & towel rolls (avoid heavily inked items)
- Nutshells (EXCEPT for walnuts, which are toxic to plants)
- Unwaxed cardboard boxes or cartons (ripped into small pieces)
- Paper bags (shredded)
- Any other mixed papers like paper plates without waxy coating

### *From the bathroom:*

- Used facial tissues
- Hair (not dyed or bleached)
- Toilet paper rolls (shredded)
- Nail clippings
- 100% cotton products

### *From the laundry room:*

- Dryer lint (if used with natural fiber laundry such as 100% cotton items)
- Old cotton towels, sheets, and clothing (100% cotton & shredded)

### *From the office:*

- Bills & other plain documents (shredded)
- Envelopes (without plastic window, shredded)
- Pencil shavings

### *From the yard/around the house:*

- Dry leaves
- Straw & dry hay
- Wood chips & sawdust from untreated wood
- Dried grass clippings
- Newspaper (shredded)
- Burlap sacks (cut/torn into small pieces)
- Old rope or twine (chopped, natural, unwaxed only)

### *Animal-related:*

- Feathers
- Hair
- Bedding from chickens
- Fallen birds' nests

## COMPOST STORAGE SUGGESTIONS

Below are a few suggestions for different bins and pails to collect your compost materials/ingredients! You can buy many of these products (or products similar to them) on Amazon or at retailers such as the Home Depot, Loews, ACE Hardware, and more! For direct Amazon links, click on the image or visit our website <https://www.tectn.org/compost-bin-suggestions> and click on the image there! You can also order your compost materials through us for free (limited to 1 free kit per household)

### INDOOR COLLECTION CONTAINERS

Below are a few suggestions/ideas for where to store your food scraps from the kitchen--each are small enough that they can fit on your kitchen counter! This is a convenient way to store your food scraps indoors until you want to bring them outside to add to your pile! To reduce the odor of your food scraps, look for containers with air filters!



- 2.4 gallon capacity
- Odor-reduction filter
- \$30



- 1.3 gallon capacity
- No leakage or rust w/stainless steel
- \$23 w/Amazon Prime



- 1.5 gallon capacity
- Odor-blockers & Dishwasher safe
- Made w/biodegradable bamboo fiber
- \$40 w/Amazon Prime

### OUTDOOR COMPOST BINS

Below are a few suggestions/ideas for different types of bins/ways to store your compost in your backyard! Don't want to buy a compost bin? Follow the instructions on the next page to create your own!



- 120 gallon capacity
- Large over top entrance for easy access
- Made w/100% recycled & UV-resistant plastic
- \$100



- 12 separate 18.5 gal containers
- Tumbler design so you don't have to turn compost by hand
- beginner-friendly
- \$97



- 82 gallon storage
- Adjustable vents that help experienced composts regulate airflow manually
- made from 100% recycled materials
- \$104

# D.I.Y. COMPOST BIN INSTRUCTIONS

Don't want to buy a compost bin? Here are some easy instructions to create your own bin with just a few materials and tools!

## OPTION 1: CLOSED CONTAINER

**THINGS YOU WILL NEED:** durable plastic bin, power drill, soil (preferably from the garden), worms



### STEP ONE: FIND A BIN

This is a great opportunity to repurpose a plastic storage bin that might be lying around your house!



### STEP TWO: DRILL HOLES

Oxygen is key to ensuring that the composting process can occur. In order to provide proper ventilation, drill holes towards/at the top of the container and on the bottom.

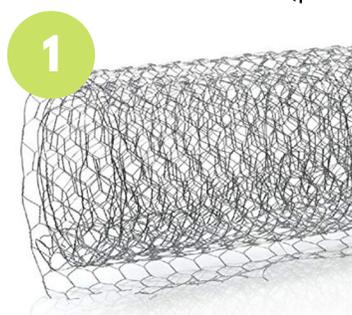


### STEP THREE: HAPPY COMPOSTING!

Once you have drilled enough holes to create enough air flow, it's time to start composting! Start by creating a base of soil and other brown material (sticks, dry leaves, etc.) and follow the steps on page 3!

## OPTION 2: OPEN PILE

**THINGS YOU WILL NEED:** 4 wood stakes, chicken wire (10-12.5ft long), 4-8 zip ties, wire cutters, gloves, soil (preferably from the garden), worms



### STEP ONE: CUT THE WIRE

Once you have found a sunny spot in your backyard, put on your gloves and cut wire (careful-cut wire can be very sharp) and make sure no ends are sticking out. Your compost pile should be at least 3 feet in diameter, which requires about 10 feet of wire.



### STEP TWO: SET UP THE STAKES & SECURE THE WIRE

Place the 4 wood stakes in the ground, forming the 4 corners of the pile (remember-the pile should be at least 3 feet in diameter). Wrap the wire around the 4 posts and secure them with zip ties.



### STEP THREE: HAPPY COMPOSTING!

Once the pile is set up, you can start composting! Create a base of garden soil and other brown material (and worms for a nice jumpstart!) and follow the steps on page 3!

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## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

*Composting doesn't have to be rocket science! The science of composting is rather imperfect, so don't worry if your compost isn't looking A+. There is an easy fix for almost every problem.*

### WHY IS MY COMPOST SMELLY?

If your compost is smelling funky, it may be because there is too much moisture in your pile. Excess levels of moisture can be tied to a couple of causes: lack of aeration (your compost can't breathe) or too many green materials (your vegetable and fruit scraps are rotting, not breaking down). Turn your compost and add some brown materials like leaves or shredded paper into the compost pile.

### MY COMPOST ISN'T BREAKING DOWN?

A compost pile that isn't "composting" is not ideal! Your compost pile likely lacks enough green materials to generate the heat and energy required for breaking down. Add some more greens and let the composting commence!

### MY COMPOST IS TOO WET/TOO DRY?

The ideal moisture level of a composting pile should be similar to a wrung out sponge. The compost pile should be damp to the touch but not sopping wet. If it's too dry, add some water or green material. If it is too wet, add some brown material!

### WHY IS MY COMPOST PILE IS A BUFFET FOR WILD ANIMALS?

Wild animals may be cute and cuddly from a distance but they can be a menace in your compost pile. Avoid putting meat, fish, or dairy into your compost as these can attract unwanted compost critters. It is also a good practice to keep your compost covered by placing a tarp or something similar to deter these animals.

### SHOULD THERE BE THIS MANY BUGS IN MY COMPOST?

Yes! A healthy compost pile or bin will have a lot of different bugs. Sow-bugs and black soldier flies are some of the most common bugs which call your compost pile home. Nearly all of these tiny creatures are harmless and will not bother you one bit!

### HOW OFTEN SHOULD I TURN MY PILE?

While there is no exact science to turning your pile, a good rule of thumb would be to turn your pile (with at least 3 full rotations) once a week. Otherwise, you can just monitor your pile and if it's starting to smell or look too wet, that would be a good time to turn it again and get some more airflow into the pile!

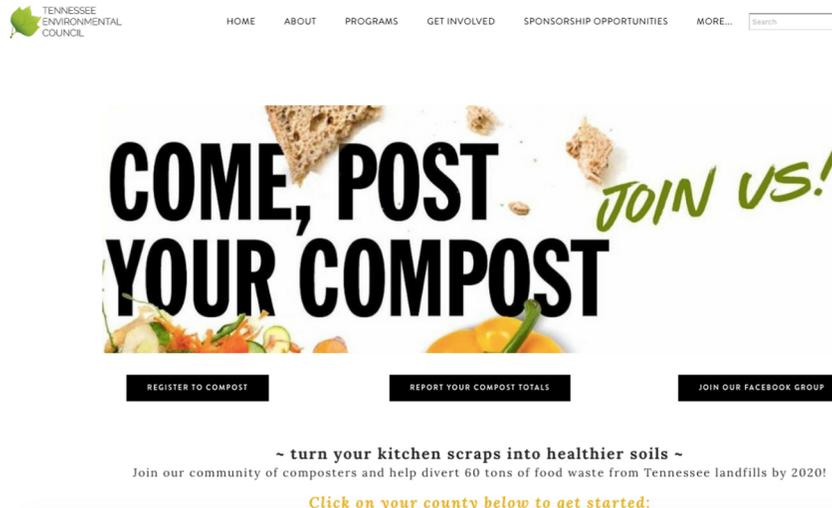
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# REPORTING YOUR TOTALS

Interested in composting with our statewide community? Sign up for Come, Post Your Compost and begin tracking your food waste totals! Your contributions are key to helping us achieve our goal of diverting tons of food waste from Tennessee's landfills.

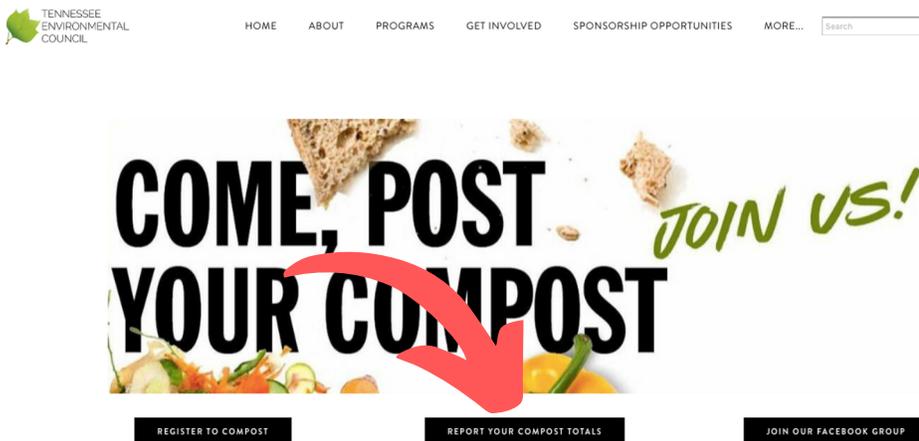
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go to [tectn.org/comepostyourcompost](http://tectn.org/comepostyourcompost)



2

click "Report Your Compost Totals"



3

Scroll down and fill out the form!

A few things to consider when you fill out the form:

- make sure to enter the email address that you used to sign up with Come, Post Your Compost
- When entering in/weighing your compost totals, **you don't need to worry about being too specific**--just eyeball your food waste that you add to the pile in terms of pounds or gallons (think of gallon milk jugs)

#### Your Email Address \*

It MUST be the email you signed up with -- otherwise we will not be able to count it!

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

#### Compost Total (since the last time you submitted) \*

\* "Compost Total" refers to the amount of food waste composted \*

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

#### In \*

Gallons

Pounds

#### Time spent composting / submitting / spreading the word since your last submission? \*

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

#### In \*

Minutes

Hours

# OTHER WAYS TO REDUCE YOUR FOOD WASTE

Below are a few suggestions on other ways you can help us divert your food waste from Tennessee's landfills!

## REDUCE

- Plan meals & shop wisely
- Serve smaller portions
- Avoid impulse or bulk purchases
- Understand expiration dates ("use by" vs. "best by")
- Buy imperfect produce
- Freeze unused ingredients

## RECOVER

- Donate to food banks
  - Visit your county page for more information!
- Food Gleaners
  - Food gleaning simply collecting excess fresh food from farms, gardens, markets, grocers, restaurants, and any other food sources and providing it to those in need

## RECYCLE

Unable to compost in your backyard? Check out your county page to see if there are any facilities or services that care of your compost for you.

While some counties may not have these resources, you can do the following:

- connect with a local farmer
- write to your county commissioner and ask about setting up a compost service/facility
- check your surrounding counties for existing services