

Make Your Own Kitchen Waste Composter



Composting food scraps can turn a waste product into a free soil amendment for your lawn or garden. However, composting food scraps in an open pile or mixed with yard waste can attract unwanted pests such as rats or possums. By following the directions on this sheet, you can easily and inexpensively make your own rodent-proof food digester.

Getting Started

One of the easiest ways to compost non-meat food waste is using a garbage can sunk in the ground. You can use an old or new can, but it should have a tight-fitting lid. Galvanized metal cans work well and do not rust (a 30 gal. can suits the average family). Drill or punch about 30 drain holes, 1/4 to 3/8 inches in diameter, in the can bottom and around the lower sides. If the lid is not tight-fitting or if you do not have a lid, you can make a lid from a piece of plywood and strap it on with bungee cords.

Dig a hole about 15 inches deep in a well-drained corner of your yard and set the can into the hole, pushing soil around the sides to firmly plant the can (see drawing). You're ready to compost!

Composting

To compost, put vegetable-based food scraps in your can, alternately layering with some dry leaves, sawdust, or shredded newspaper. The texture of the finished compost will depend on the materials composted and how long they spend in the can, and may range from a wet slurry to a dark, crumbly substance similar to soil. Depending on your food habits, your composter will likely fill in four to eight months.

Harvesting the Compost

To harvest, shovel the top layer of un-composted food to one side and shovel the dark, soil-like compost from the bottom. Finished compost should be dry and sweet smelling; if it is wet and smelly, mix it with some soil before using. In the meantime, make room for more food scraps in the can by replacing the layer of un-composted food in the can or burying it in a trench in the garden. Or, set up a second can. Use one until full and then switch to the second, switching any un-composted food scraps between the two.

Using Finished Compost

The most common uses of compost are as a soil enhancer for planting and in potting mixes and as mulch

on established plants. As food waste compost contains more nutrients than yard waste compost, it should be used sparingly. Application could include applying it up to an inch deep as mulch around plants, digging up to two inches into garden soil, or adding up to 20% food waste compost to a commercial or homemade yard waste mix.

What Should I Compost?

Do Compost:

- Vegetable Scraps
- Fruit rinds, cores, pits and peels
- Coffee grounds and filters
- Tea bags and loose leaf tea
- Pasta, breads, cereals, grains
- Paper napkins, towels
- Egg shells

Do Not Compost:

- Meat
- Fish and poultry
- Bones
- Oily foods
- Cheese
- Butter and dairy products
- Other animal products



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ON BACK 

 **King County**
Department of
Natural Resources and Parks
Solid Waste Division

Five Steps to: Natural Yard Care





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Department of
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Compost Facts

- A teaspoon of soil has as many as 4 billion microorganisms living in it.
- Under optimal conditions, a large compost pile will heat up to between 120 and 140 degrees F.
- In King County, over 35 percent of the waste collected from single-family residences is composed of food scraps and soiled paper.
- Marcus Cato, a Roman scientist and farmer more than 2,000 years ago, developed what is perhaps the first compost formula in recorded history. He insisted that all raw materials such as animal manures and vegetation be composted to build soil fertility throughout the Roman Empire.

FAQs?

Q. What do I do to avoid odors and fruit flies?

A. Fruit flies are attracted to exposed and excessively moist food scraps which become odorous when left to rot. Keep food scraps covered by adding dry materials like shredded paper, straw, leaves, or sawdust. This helps eliminate odors and fruit flies.

Q. How do I avoid pests?

A. To keep rodents out of kitchen waste composters, put a rock on the lid or use a bungee cord to hold the lid on. Avoid adding meat and dairy products as

they attract animals, smell bad and should not be composted in a home composter.

Q. Can I compost pet waste?

A. Pet waste should not be composted in home composters as the compost may not get hot enough to kill harmful pathogens. Instead, bury pet waste in a foot-deep hole in ornamental gardens away from waterways. Put three to four inches of pet waste at the bottom of the hole, using the shovel to mix the waste into the soil. Cover the waste with at least eight inches of soil to keep pests out.

Questions/ Additional Resources for Composting:

- Call the Natural Lawn & Garden Hotline at **206-633-0224**
- Soil and composting: www.metrokc.gov/soils
- Turn Over a New Leaf (brochure)
 - Yard and garden topics: <http://dnr.metrokc.gov/topics/yard-and-garden/>
 - For printable documents and more information on Natural Yard Care and other topics, please visit: www.metrokc.gov/dnrp/swd/naturalyardcare/documents.asp



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