

# Composting at Home: Going Green

Across the United States, people are finding more and more places to deposit their compost, such as at farmers' markets or green spaces. Once a farming and home economist tradition, composting is finding revitalization. This movement is growing in popularity as an effort to improve the state of the earth.

## Why compost?

- More than 40% of all food produced in America is not eaten
- More than 29 million tons of food waste is produced each year
- Food scraps make up 17% of what we send to landfills in the United States
- The average American wastes more than ½ pound of food each day
- 25% of what enters our homes is not eaten, when you count what we put down the disposal and throw out
- American restaurants throw away more than 6000 tons of food every day, according to some calculations
- Food costs America more than \$100 billion annually, according to the same studies
- The average four-person household wastes about \$600 of food each year

## What does wasted food mean for the environment?

Wasting food misuses the time, energy, and resources in money and oil that are needed to produce that food. The food winds up costing more to the earth than the purchase price, because more energy is needed to dispose of the waste than is used to produce the food.

Food rotting in landfills contributes to global warming by causing methane emissions or greenhouse gasses.

Wet food waste is the main threat to groundwater or stream pollution, in addition to the potential for leaks and runoff from some landfills.

## How does composting help the environment?

Composting is great for the environment, because compost is:

- Essential for growing plants and produce
- Great for the environment by reducing waste that goes into landfills

## What can I compost?

You can compost any organic material, either plant or animal. This includes:

- Vegetables
- Vegetable scraps
- Fruits
- Tea bags
- Nuts
- Seeds
- Meat

- Eggs
- Coffee
- Paper
- Bones
- Peels

Basically, you can compost anything that comes from the earth, including:

- Grass clippings
- Fresh manure (horse, chicken, rabbit, cow)
- Kitchen scraps
- Weeds
- Green leaves
- Leftover produce from the garden or kitchen
- Brown, dry leaves
- Dried grass
- Cornstalks (shredded)
- Straw
- Sawdust (in moderation; see next section)

## **How do I compost?**

You can compost several different ways.

**An airtight bucket in the kitchen:** Keep the bucket either in your refrigerator or on the countertop. Take it to a composting spot (usually at your farmers' market) each week. Most major cities have composting collection Web sites listed on the Internet.

**Open compost bin:** Choose a designated spot and make a container without a lid for "green" materials. Allow rainwater and air to accelerate the process of making the compost. This type of bin may attract pests and animals, so many people choose to top their open container with a layer of straw.

**Closed compost bin:** Many people choose to purchase a compost bin, which comes with directions for making successful compost. These are good choices for gardeners, who use the compost to plant and grow their seeds. An online search can help find the one that is right for you.

Visit [www.howtocompost.org](http://www.howtocompost.org) for more information.

## **References and recommended readings**

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Review Date 2/11  
G-1512