

# AT-HOME COMPOSTING

## WHAT IS COMPOSTING?

Composting is the process of recycling organic matter, such as leaves and food scraps, into a valuable fertilizer that can enrich soil and plants. Compost, the decomposed matter that results from composting, is made up of two main components: nitrogen (greens) and carbon (browns), which are mixed with air and water. Rancho Cucamonga residents can compost by participating in the City's food waste collection program or by composting at home. This worksheet provides tips and tricks for starting your own at-home composting system.

Source: [NRDC](#)

## WHY COMPOSTING IS IMPORTANT

Composting is an easy way to reduce methane-producing organic materials like food waste in our landfills. Reducing methane, a potent greenhouse gas, can help improve air quality and lessen the impacts on health conditions such as asthma. Compost is also a great way to naturally enrich soil without the use of synthetic fertilizers.

Source: [NRDC](#)

## BENEFITS OF COMPOSTING AT HOME

- ✓ Reduce waste going to the landfill
- ✓ Improve soil health in your gardens
- ✓ Use less water. Compost helps retain moisture in your soil.
- ✓ Save money on store-bought soil conditioners

## AT-HOME COMPOST DO'S & DONT'S

Some items that can be composted through the City's food waste collection program cannot be composted at home. Here are some important Do's & Don'ts for At-Home Composting.

### AT-HOME COMPOST DO'S



#### GREENS (NITROGEN)

vegetable scraps  
coffee grounds  
fruit peels  
eggshells  
paper tea bags  
grass & yard clippings



#### BROWNS (CARBON)

shredded paper  
paper towels  
shredded cardboard  
dried leaves & soil  
straw bedding  
sawdust

### AT-HOME COMPOST DONT'S



meat  
fatty food  
bones  
pet waste\*

diseased plants  
treated wood  
dairy products  
oil/grease

\*Pet waste should not go into at-home compost or your green waste bin. Pet waste should be bagged and thrown into the black trash bin

# AT-HOME COMPOSTING



## AT-HOME COMPOSTING METHODS

There are many different recipes for at-home composting, but in general there needs to be equal parts of green materials and equal parts of brown materials by volume. You may layer or mix these materials in a pile or enclosure, but be sure all materials chopped or shredded into small pieces no larger than 3"x3" to speed up decomposition. There are two primary methods for at-home composting, the Slow & Cold method, and the Fast & Hot method.

### SLOW & COLD

VS

### FAST & HOT

Also known as passive composting, this method allows organic material to break down anaerobically, meaning that organic material is broken down by microorganisms that thrive in an oxygen-deprived environment. Slow & Cold composting is best for those who have little organic waste to compost, limited time to tend to the process, and if you are not in a hurry for finished compost. True to its name, this process can take over one year to complete.

Also known as active composting, this method requires an optimum ratio of green and brown material, aeration, and moisture, to decompose organic waste through heat and microorganisms. This method requires more attention, but if managed properly, it can produce compost in as little as 2 - months, and the pile's temperature will destroy most weeds, bug larvae and eggs, and pesticides/herbicides.

Source: [NRDC](#)

## QUICK TIPS



- Pick a location with equal amounts of sun and shade
- Smaller pieces decompose faster, shred/chop materials larger than 12"
- Mix equal parts of greens and brown by VOLUME
- Compost should be **as moist as a wrung-out sponge**, if not add some water
- You can water regularly during the summer and cover compost during winter months

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



[CalRecycle.com](#) offers resources for everything you need to know about composting at home.



Treehugger.com offers step-by step guides on [Cold Composting](#) and [Hot Composting](#).



[United States Environmental Protection Agency](#) offers tips for composting at home.



# AT-HOME COMPOSTING

## COMPOST BINS & PILES

When composting at home, there are many options for containing your compost. Choose the composting bin or pile based on what is more convenient and affordable for you.

### OPEN PILE

Open piles are great for the Slow & Cold methods and are the least expensive option. Open piles can attract pests, if most of your organic waste comes from food scraps so it's recommended for yard waste composting.

### STACKABLES/TUMBLERS/CONES

The stackable, tumbler, and cone compost containers can be readily found at garden centers and home improvement stores. These containers are fully enclosed, making them the most pest resistant. These containers can also help speed up the Hot & Fast method. Prices vary by size, but these are one of the more expensive options.

## DIY COMPOST BIN

### WIRE/MESH BIN

You can make a wire/mesh bin by wrapping chicken wire or hardware cloth around four (4) stakes that are placed in a circle or square that measures approximately 3ft x 3ft

### PALLET BIN

You can make a pallet bin by screwing four (4) raw or heat-treated wood pallets together to form a square.

### STORAGE CONTAINER BIN

You can transform any plastic bin, like a storage container or lidded trash can, into a compost bin by drilling rows of 1/4 inch holes around the bin (rows should be 4-6 inches apart), and cutting off the base of the container.

### HOOP/SQUARE BINS

Hoop or square bins are typically open-top bins made from wood or wire mesh that keeps compost contained without enclosing it completely. These can be used for Hot or Cold method composting. Prices vary by size and material.



## TROUBLESHOOTING YOUR COMPOST

Symptom	Problem(s)	Solution(s)
The pile smells bad	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Not enough air</li><li>2. Too much moisture</li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Turn the pile if not enough air</li><li>2. Add dry materials if too moist</li></ol>
The pile will not heat up	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Not enough moisture</li><li>2. Pile size is too small</li><li>3. Lack of nitrogen-rich material</li><li>4. Particle size is too big</li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Add water if dry</li><li>2. Build pile to at least 3' x 3' x 3'</li><li>3. Mix in grass clippings or fruit/vegetable scraps</li><li>4. Chip or grind materials</li></ol>
The pile attracts flies, rodents, or pets	Pile contains compost don't like bones, meat, fatty or starchy foods, or animal manure	Alter materials added to pile; bury fruit/vegetable scraps in the middle of the pile, or under 8" to 10" inches of soil, or compost them in a worm bin.
Pile has slugs in it (and so does garden)	Pile is easily accessible and provides daytime hiding place and breeding ground for slugs	Remove slugs and slug eggs from pile (eggs look like very small clusters of pearls). Locate compost pile far from vegetable gardens and/or create barriers around pile/garden (for example, traps and copper flashing).

Source: [CalRecycle.ca.gov](http://CalRecycle.ca.gov)

## FINISHED PRODUCT?

You know your compost is ready once the pile is a consistent dark brown color that crumbles like soil and has an earthy smell. The food waste and paper materials should be unrecognizable, and there should be no bad odors. If you find any large pieces of material that did not fully decompose in your compost, you can pick them out and throw them into a new pile.

