

Composting

(Teaching Suggestions & Resources)

Canadians produce more garbage than any other country in the world, approximately 15 kilograms of garbage per person per week. Contrary to what some may say, we can not recycle our way out of the ever-growing problems associated with garbage disposal. We must do more.

Household garbage accounts for approximately 40% of the solid waste disposed of in Canada. Household garbage can be reduced by about one third by composting your kitchen and garden wastes. By doing so, you will also be returning organic matter back to the soil when you compost in your garden.

Organic matter in the soil improves plant growth by helping to break down heavy clay soils, adding water and nutrient-holding capacity to sandy soils and adding essential nutrients to any soil. Healthy plants help clean our air and conserve our soil.

Audio Visual Resource and Activity Suggestions for Elementary School

REDUCE, REUSE, RECYCLE Video (15 minutes)

To order this video go to PITCH-IN CANADA's online Store at www.pitch-in.ca

What do I put in the Compost?

Try to combine nitrogen rich materials with carbon rich materials in your compost heap. Which materials can you add?

Nitrogen Rich Materials	Carbon Rich Materials
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• fresh grass clippings• plant trimmings• house plants• manure• kitchen scraps including vegetable & fruit peelings, coffee grounds, tea bags and rinsed out egg shells	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• dry leaves• straw• dry seaweed

What don't I put in the Compost?

Do NOT add the following:

- cooked kitchen scraps
- meat/bone/fish scraps
- grains
- fatty foods including cheese, salad dressing, butter and cooking oil
- dog and cat feces
- diseased or insect infested plants
- pernicious weeds (eg: morning glory, buttercup, quackgrass)

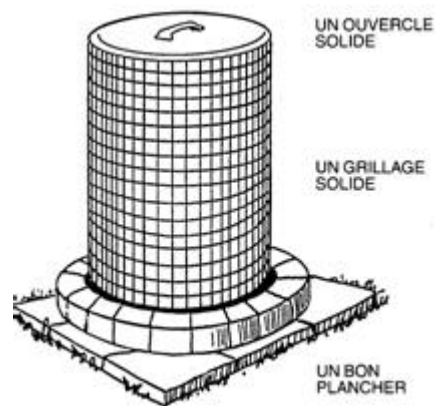
How do I make a Composter?

There are many designs of compost containers to choose from. You can build your own or buy a commercial model.

In urban areas: choose a rodent-proof bin to ensure that public health standards are maintained.

General Instructions: one quarter or one half inch wire mesh of sufficient strength (19 gauge or stronger) will exclude small animals. Sides, a solid floor (eg: concrete patio stones), and a secure lid must all be included in your design.

Here is a drawing of a sample composter:



What is the best location for a Composter?

Choose a spot where there is good water drainage. If the drainage is good, a shady spot is best so that the compost pile does not dry out. If the drainage is poor, a sunny spot is best.

How do I maintain my Compost Pile?

Ideally, you should try to mix different organic materials together. When you add nitrogen-rich green material try to add an equal amount of carbon-rich brown material.

The key is to alternate layers of organic waste, keeping the compost pile moist but not dripping wet and turning it frequently. It is helpful, although not essential, to add thin layers of soil in order to add micro-organisms to the pile.

I live in an apartment - can I Compost?

Yes. Worm composting would be most appropriate for you. Your bin could sit on the balcony in warm weather and be brought indoors in winter.

Can I compost in Winter?

The compost process generates heat. Cold weather will not destroy your compost. It just slows it down. Continue to add material to your heap throughout the winter, even if it freezes. After spring thaw, the decomposition process will become active again.

How do I use my Compost?

By adding compost to your garden, you help build good soil texture and structure. These qualities enable soil to retain nutrients, moisture and air which support healthy plants.

Finished compost, when removed from the bin or pile after three to six months (earlier in some areas of Canada), should resemble rich soil. Mix 7.5cm of compost into the top 15cm of the garden beds before planting.

Compost can also be placed on top of the ground around growing plants, shrubs and trees to help retain moisture in the soil, smother weeds and prevent soil compaction.

Finally, compost is an excellent soil conditioner.

Having Troubles with your compost pile?

Check this troubleshooting chart

SYMPTOMS	PROBLEM	SOLUTION
The compost has a bad odour	Not enough air, or too wet	Turn it
The centre of the pile is dry	Not enough water	Moisten materials while turning the pile
The compost is damp and warm in the middle but nowhere else	Too small	Collect more material and mix the old ingredients into a new pile
The heap is damp and sweet-smelling but still will not heat up	Lack of nitrogen	Mix in a nitrogen source (fresh grass clippings, fresh manure, bloodmeal, or commercial fertilizer high in nitrogen)

Suggestions to promote Composting

- Promote a home composting program.
- Start a compost at your school, community center, church or wherever compostable wastes are generated
- Identify people in your community who are composting and invite them to speak to your school, class, group, etc...
- Encourage your municipal government to make composting part of its waste management program by providing free, or assisting with the cost of, back yard composters or instituting collection of compostable material.

Remember, it will cost your municipal government less in garbage pick-up fees if household garbage is reduced by one-third! That should pay for the cost of supplying composters!

PITCH-IN CANADA needs your help to maintain its programs. We are a non-profit organization, not a government agency. Your \$10, or \$25, \$35 or even more if you are able makes a big difference and ensures that we can continue to maintain, and hopefully expand, our programs, including our very popular website: www.pitch-in.ca