

Backyard Composting Guide



Help grow your garden and your business.

Composting is nature's way of recycling organic waste by breaking material down naturally, mimicking the earth's natural processes. By creating the optimal environment for decomposer organisms in the soil, our organic waste is converted into nutrient-rich compost.

Getting Started

Starting a composting program at your bed and breakfast will significantly reduce the amount of waste you send to the landfill. To decide what composting system will work best for your bed and breakfast, you must determine how much organic waste you produce.

This guide includes tips and suggestions to help you set up a composting program that works for your bed and breakfast.

Did You Know?

Organic material accounts for 30 percent of all waste generated in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Choose a Bin

Choose a bin that works for the amount of organic waste you produce. A standard plastic or wooden bin may be preferable for a small urban yard, whereas in a larger garden, a three-bin composter or a second bin may be required to accommodate extra yard waste.

Consider building your own bin or visit your local hardware store to purchase a bin.

See www.mmsb.nl.ca for compost bin plans.



Choose a Location

On Your Property:

- Place your compost bin in a sunny area with good drainage to encourage fast decomposition and prevent excess moisture from accumulating during the wet season.
- Place the bin in a convenient location where it is accessible year-round.
- Turn the soil in the location where the compost bin will be placed; cover the ground with a layer of small branches and then place the bin on top.

In Your Kitchen:

- Place a small, covered container in your kitchen for collecting food scraps. Reuse a bucket or an ice cream container to collect scraps. Collection containers can also be purchased from a hardware store.
- The amount of waste you produce will determine how often your kitchen container needs to be emptied. Once or twice a week is usually sufficient.

Adding Organic Waste

Organic waste can be found in your kitchen, garden and throughout your home. It is important to maintain a balance of green and brown materials in your compost bin. A 50/50 ratio by weight (not volume) is preferred. Below is a list of greens and browns that you can compost from your bed and breakfast's kitchen and yard.

Greens:

- Fruit and vegetable peels and scraps
- Crushed egg shells
- Coffee grounds and filters
- Tea bags and leaves
- Fresh grass clippings
- Houseplant trimmings

Browns:

- Rice, oats and other grains
- Dried corn stalks
- Pasta (without sauce or oil)
- Peanut shells
- Bread and other baked goods
- Paper products such as newspaper, paper towels, toilet paper rolls and cereal boxes
- Dried leaves
- Dried, untreated grass clippings
- Non-diseased plants
- Twigs and small branches
- Woodchips and sawdust (from untreated wood)

Items to Avoid

Although the materials listed below are organic, they may cause problems such as odours, pests or unnecessary toxins.

- All meat products
- Fish and shellfish
- Bones
- Fat, grease, oils and sauces
- All dairy products
- Weeds gone to seed
- Diseased plants
- Dog and cat waste
- Plants treated with pesticide
- Wood treated with chemicals
- Charcoal

TIP: To speed up decomposition, cut up materials before adding them to your bin.

TIP: To cut down on odours, empty your kitchen collection bin regularly and rinse the container each time it's emptied or line the bin with newspaper.

Maintaining the Pile

- Add layers of browns and greens to the bin in equal weight. Finish with a layer of brown material on top to minimize odors and keep flies away.

- Keep the compost pile as moist as a wrung-out sponge. Your compost will get most of the moisture it needs from green material. If it gets too wet, add more brown material; if it gets too dry, add more green material or simply sprinkle with water.
- Keep the compost pile aerated by turning the material inside the bin each time you add new organics. Place a shovel or pitchfork next to the bin to serve as a reminder.
- Help initiate the composting process by adding a few shovels of garden soil or finished compost the first time you add organic material; mix it all together.

TIP: Collect and store fallen leaves in a covered container next to the compost bin. Cover with a layer of leaves after each time you add new material or turn your bin.



Composting with the Seasons

- **FALL:** Harvest any compost to make room for material to be added throughout the winter.
- **WINTER:** Continue adding organic waste. Even if the pile freezes, decomposition will begin again when the temperature rises.
- **SPRING:** Start turning the pile again to add oxygen. Add brown material to absorb extra moisture.
- **SUMMER:** Maximize productivity during our short warm season by turning the pile frequently and adding layers of browns and greens.

Using the Finished Compost

Finished compost is dark and crumbly and has an earthy smell. You will know your bin is ready to harvest when the materials inside take this form and none of the original material is visible.

Harvest finished compost from the bottom of the bin when it is ready or start a new compost pile while waiting for the materials in the original bin to fully decompose.

Uses for finished compost:

- Mix compost into the soil of new lawns and garden beds.
- Mix with potting soil for use in potted houseplants.
- Use as mulch around trees, shrubs and plants.
- Use as a conditioner to help aerate clay soils.

- Give some to a friend or gardener.
- Use as a top dressing on established flower beds, gardens and lawns.

TIP: A compost pile that is turned often and given the proper ingredients will break down more quickly than one that is not maintained.

Why Compost?

■ Benefits to your bed and breakfast:

- Replaces the need for chemical fertilizers, pesticides and excess watering—saving you time and money.
- Helps your lawn, garden and indoor plants thrive.
- Enriches the soil with nutrient-rich organic matter, improves heat and moisture retention, and promotes the growth of healthy, pest-resistant plants and lawns.

■ Benefits to your community:

- Lowers waste disposal costs for collecting and transporting organic waste.
- Provides a positive example for other tourism operators in the community by managing organic waste in an environmentally-friendly way.

■ Benefits to the environment:

- Diverts 30 percent of your total waste from the landfill.

- Requires less land for waste disposal.
- Reduces methane gas and leachate production.
- Protects the air, water and soil.

Frequently Asked Questions

- **What should I do if my compost starts to smell bad?** If your compost pile has an unpleasant odour, it's either not getting enough oxygen or it's too wet. To eliminate unpleasant odours, turn it thoroughly and frequently (to add oxygen), mix in a few shovels of garden soil, and add brown material to absorb extra moisture.
- **What should I do if my compost pile is not composting?**
 - Check the basics. Turn the pile frequently and add a balance of greens and browns. Make sure the bin is located in a sunny area with good drainage.
 - If the pile is too wet, balance the moisture by adding brown material (e.g., shredded paper or dried leaves) and turn the pile thoroughly after adding new content.
 - If the pile is too dry, add green material (e.g., food scraps or green grass clippings) or sprinkle with water if necessary.
 - If the materials inside the bin don't seem to be heating up, the pile could be too small. Continue adding brown and green material to increase the volume.

- **What can I do with my grass clippings?**

You can add fresh grass clippings to your compost pile; just be sure to balance the fresh green grass with brown material or add the grass only after it has turned brown. If you accumulate more grass clippings than your compost bin can accommodate, try Grass Cycling. Cutting your lawn frequently and only cutting the top third of the grass blade lets you leave clippings on the ground where they can return nutrients back into the lawn.

- **What can I do with all my leaves?** Collect and store fallen leaves throughout the year to add to your bin and help maintain the proper balance of browns and greens. If you still have leaves left over, you can start a leaf mould by storing leaves in a bin or covered pile and allowing them to break down slowly over a 1-3 year period.



■ **Does composting attract pests?**

Setting up a compost bin will not attract new pest populations to your property. If pests are currently a problem in your area, the following tips will help you set up and maintain a pest-free compost pile:

- Do not add meat, fish, bones, oil, fat or dairy products to your bin.
- Locate your bin away from things that offer food or shelter to pests such as bird feeders, open water, wood piles, shrubbery and sheds.
- Cover exposed food waste with a layer of brown material.

- Keep your compost pile moist. Pests are more inclined to nest in a dry compost bin.
- Place your bin at least 12 inches away from fences, decks, or buildings.
- Turn your compost pile regularly. A regularly disturbed pile is unattractive to pests.
- Harvest finished compost at the bottom of the bin; this will discourage nesting.
- Place galvanized wire mesh under your bin to prevent burrowing.

