

Seasonal Checklist

Backyard Composting all Year

Composting is not restricted to the summer. With minimal effort, you can take steps to ensure the year-round production of top-quality compost. Here is a quick seasonal guide:

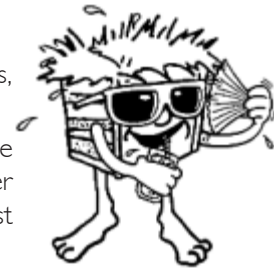


Spring

- Thoroughly aerate your pile and add browns if needed. If you have finished compost spread the compost on your lawn or garden.
- If you have been collecting “green” compostables over the winter, now is the time to add some “browns” for balance. Save some leaves from your spring yard clean-up to add to the compost bin.

Summer

- As you add kitchen or fresh plant waste to the pile, cover with leaves, other brown material or soil.
- Aerate or stir the pile regularly. For optimal results, mix or turn the pile three to five times per season for a wooden bin or one to two times per month for a plastic bin, using a pitchfork, garden hoe, shovel or compost aerator.
- Leave grass clippings on the lawn. They add nutrients and help retain soil moisture.



Fall

- Harvest finished compost. If desired, empty the bin and move it to a convenient spot nearer the house. You will want to have it handy during the winter.
- Collect and set aside a good supply of fallen leaves to add over the winter or when the pile thaws in the spring. This will supply “brown” material to your compost throughout spring and summer.
- Use any leftover leaves as mulch on garden beds or underneath large trees.

Winter

- Don't stop composting. Keep adding kitchen scraps to the pile even during the coldest weather. The regular freeze-thaw cycle aids in breaking down the cellular structure of materials and speeds the process along when warmer weather returns.
- When you add materials in winter, cover them with the leaves you set aside in the fall. Or wait until the pile thaws in the spring, and mix in leaves or other brown material.



Composting in Winter



Despite the harsh weather, composting can be done right through the winter. Simple modifications to your composting routine will keep your compost bin working year round. As a matter of fact, the freeze-thaw cycle helps break down the cellular structure of the materials, so the pile will compost very quickly when spring arrives.

Avoid a wet, sloppy pile

The most important thing to remember is to save some leaves in the fall. Having them available next to your compost bin makes it easy to add a handful or two of leaves whenever you add green materials. This method ensures a proper blend of green and brown materials to produce good-quality compost. Adding leaves helps to soak-up extra moisture when materials begin to thaw.

No more shovelling

This option is especially interesting if you do not want to clean a path through the snow to reach your compost bin at the back of the yard. Start by filling your compost bin with leaves in the fall. Collect greens throughout the winter in a separate container outside. Just keep a large, covered plastic pail or a clean garbage can close to your backdoor, and simply transfer the waste from your kitchen into the pail whenever you throw out the trash. When spring comes around, add the contents of the pail to the pile of leaves that is already sitting in your compost bin.

Winter may also be a good opportunity to build a “hot compost pile”. This is achieved by simply alternating 6-inch layers of green and brown materials, while adding a bit of water and soil between each layer. Top off with some leaves to keep odours down and to trap in the heat. By turning or aerating the pile at appropriate times, you could end up with finished compost in as little as 4 to 6 weeks after spring thaw.

Warm through the winter

If you want to keep the decomposition process alive in the winter, you may want to consider keeping your bin in a protected area, where heat can be trapped inside. Adding straw or hay around the sides and top of the bin will help to keep in some of the heat. You can also cover your bin or pile with plastic or insulation. Although these methods will keep in the heat, it may also inhibit the airflow, causing the materials to decompose anaerobically, which makes for a smelly pile. The easy solution to this problem is to stir the contents of the bin, which allows the materials to breathe. But if you want to keep the decomposition going, do not disturb the compost or built-up heat will escape.



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