



Composting: The Green (and Brown) Alternative



Composting is a great green choice. It converts your wastes into a resource or soil amendment that nurtures plants. It improves soil quality, produces healthy food and reduces your carbon footprint.

Collecting organic residuals for diversion to a municipal composting program or for composting at home can create jobs, conserve energy and natural resources, and reduce air and water pollution.

If your municipality is collecting organics for composting, or if you just want to compost at home, read on....

Separation and Collection in the Kitchen

There are several “kitchen catchers” on the market, but you can also use a recycled container or pail with or without a lid. You will want your collection bucket to be small enough to fit under your sink or on your countertop but large enough that you won’t have to empty it too often. You may also want something that allows air to flow through your scraps so that they will not smell before you do empty them. Some pre-manufactured kitchen catchers include a charcoal filter or have holes in the bucket to help with the potential odors. Some require the use of liners; paper or compostable bags to hold the scraps inside the bucket.



Kitchen catcher with compostable bag

Any food prep or post plate material, napkins and degradable silverware and spoiled food can be composted. Milk and meat products are not generally added to home compost piles, but can be composted by municipalities collecting organics because they compost great volumes of residuals and reach proper temperatures. Signage can help while learning what to put into your containers and where many people use a shared kitchen. In a municipal program, the municipality may provide containers for use in your kitchen that would be dumped into a larger container for curbside pickup. Some containers that are provided may be targeted to collect yard waste and food scrap for pickup. This is a



Kitchen Catcher with locking lid and aeration holes

good way to collect as you can layer carbon and nitrogen right in the container. Whenever you layer wet and dry material there will be little odor and the municipality may be able to reduce collection frequency. If this is the scenario, stockpile some carbon material for winter food collection as food will smell if not layered with carbon.

Compostable: food scraps, paper products, degradable silverware

Not Compostable: milk, meat, fish, oils, plastic bags, bottles and silverware



Example signage for separation



Curbside Collection

Leaf and Yardwaste (Browns)

Keep yardwaste at home! If at all possible, compost your yard waste in your back yard or a multi-family (communal) compost unit. With multi-family units, directions and good signage lead to success.

Keeping it at home is the most sustainable option and provides a great soil amendment!

Separation and Collection

Yardwaste includes leaves, evergreen needles, sticks, brush, grass clippings and garden cleanout. Depending on your municipality, containment may be required in the form of plastic, paper or reusable containers. Some municipalities require leaf and yardwaste to be left loose at the curbside.

- **Plastic Bags:** These are made of petroleum products and provide good containment but may cause contamination at the compost facility. It is difficult to debag leaves effectively without a lot of labor and is nasty work.
- **Compostable plastic bags:** These bags are designed to be incorporated into compost windrows with the yardwaste and no debagging should be necessary. These bags tend to be more expensive than the petroleum-based bags but may save in labor.
- **Paper Bags:** Paper leaf bags can be a good choice since they have a base that allows them to stand up while loading, and can be incorporated into the compost along with the leaves which avoids the debagging process. However, they can be more expensive to purchase.



Compostable Bags



Paper Leaf Bag

- **Reusable Containers:** These are generally made of durable plastic or metal with a large capacity and are intended to be used for mixed organics. Feedstock should always be layered in these containers, otherwise you will have a smelly mess and the container would need to be cleaned frequently.

- **No Containment:** Just rake them to the curb! Some municipalities may want leaf and yard waste to simply be left at curbside with no containment at all. This generally has to do with what equipment they are using to collect.



Reusable Container

Large branches, logs and stumps are collected curbside in some communities and in others you need to convey them to a transfer station for management.



Loose Leaves Curbside