
Composting transforms kitchen scraps and yard waste into "black gold" for your garden—nutrient-rich humus that feeds soil life and cuts waste by up to 30%. This beginner program is tailored for a simple 4x4' area (perfect for a backyard or balcony), using a basic three-bin system or tumbler setup. It's low-cost (~\$50-100), low-effort, and forgiving. Start in spring or fall for ideal temps (50-80°F). You'll have usable compost in 3-6 months! Each step includes What to do, Why it matters, and Tip. Track progress in a notebook—your compost journey starts now!

Step 1: Choose Your Spot

What to do: Pick a shady, level 4x4' area near your kitchen but away from the house (to contain smells).

Why it matters: Shade prevents drying out; proximity makes adding scraps easy.

Tip: Use gravel or wood chips underfoot for drainage—avoid soggy spots.

Step 2: Gather Materials

What to do: Collect "greens" (nitrogen-rich: veggie scraps, grass clippings) and "browns" (carbon-rich: leaves, cardboard). Aim for 1:2 ratio by volume.

Why it matters: Balances microbes for fast decomposition.

Tip: Save egg cartons/paper for browns—shred for quicker breakdown.

Step 3: Build or Buy a Bin

What to do: Assemble a 3-bin system from pallets (free from stores) or buy a tumbler (\$50). Each bin ~3x3x3'.

Why it matters: Contains mess, allows turning, and speeds composting.

Tip: Drill holes in sides for air; line with wire mesh to keep critters out.

Step 4: Layer the First Bin

What to do: Start with 4" browns, add 2" greens, then more browns. Water lightly to moisten (like a wrung sponge).

Why it matters: Creates an aerobic base for heat-building bacteria.

Tip: Chop large items (e.g., branches) to fit—smaller pieces compost faster.

Step 5: Add Your First Scraps

What to do: Toss in daily kitchen waste: fruit peels, coffee grounds (greens); avoid meat/dairy to prevent odors.

Why it matters: Provides steady food for decomposers.

Tip: Bury scraps under browns to deter flies. No "no-no's" like oils or diseased plants.



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Step 6: Monitor Moisture

What to do: Squeeze a handful—if drops form but no stream, it's perfect. Add water if dry.

Why it matters: Moisture fuels microbial magic; too wet = smelly anaerobic mess.

Tip: Use a spray bottle for small additions—aim for 40-60% dampness.

Step 7: Check Temperature

What to do: Insert a compost thermometer; aim for 130-160°F in the center after a week.

Why it matters: Hot temps kill weeds/seeds; cooler means slow progress.

Tip: No thermometer? Feel the pile—it should be warm like body heat.

Step 8: Turn the Pile (First Aeration)

What to do: Use a pitchfork to flip the outer pile to the center; do this weekly.

Why it matters: Oxygenates to prevent rotting and speed breakdown.

Tip: Turn on sunny days—your arms get a workout, but gloves prevent splinters.

Step 9: Balance the Browns

What to do: Add more carbon-rich browns if the pile smells ammonia-y (too many greens).

Why it matters: Prevents nutrient loss and odors.

Tip: Fall leaves are free gold—stockpile a bag for winter.

Step 10: Introduce Worms (Optional)

What to do: Add 1 lb red wigglers to the top layer for vermicomposting boost.

Why it matters: Worms aerate and speed nutrient release.

Tip: Buy from bait shops; keep moist but not soggy—worms love it!

Step 11: Cover and Protect

What to do: Top with a tarp or lid to retain heat/moisture; secure against rain/raccoons.

Why it matters: Shields from weather extremes while allowing air.

Tip: Breathable fabric works—peek weekly to check progress.

Step 12: Track Progress Monthly

What to do: Note size, smell (earthy good, rotten bad), and color (dark brown = winning).

Why it matters: Helps troubleshoot and celebrate milestones.

Tip: Take photos—your pile shrinking is the best motivation!

Step 13: Add Activators if Slow

What to do: Sprinkle finished compost or manure tea to jumpstart microbes.

Why it matters: Kickstarts stalled piles in cold weather.

Tip: A handful of garden soil from a healthy spot works wonders.



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Step 14: Turn Again (Second Aeration)

What to do: Repeat Step 8, focusing on mixing layers for even decomposition.

Why it matters: Ensures uniform breakdown; promotes diversity.

Tip: Play music—turning is therapeutic; aim for 20-30 minutes.

Step 15: Harvest Early Compost

What to do: Scoop from the bottom of Bin 1 after 2-3 months—use on beds if dark and crumbly.

Why it matters: Rewards patience; unfinished top can move to Bin 2.

Tip: Screen through ½" hardware cloth for fine texture.

Step 16: Move to Bin 2

What to do: Transfer half-decomposed pile to the middle bin; start fresh in Bin 1.

Why it matters: Keeps the cycle flowing like a production line.

Tip: Label bins "Active," "Maturing," "Finished" for easy tracking.

Step 17: Fine-Tune for Your Climate

What to do: Insulate in winter (straw bales) or shade in summer (cloth cover).

Why it matters: Maintains ideal 50-80°F for year-round brewing.

Tip: Cold climates? Hot compost in batches; hot areas? Brew in morning.

Step 18: Use Your Compost

What to do: Mix 1-2 inches into garden soil or top-dress pots; brew tea from it (per our manual).

Why it matters: Returns nutrients, improving yields 20-30%.

Tip: Side-dress tomatoes mid-season for a boost—watch 'em explode!

Step 19: Troubleshoot and Tweak

What to do: If slow, add more greens; if smelly, more browns. Adjust ratios 1:2-3.

Why it matters: Customizes to your waste stream for efficiency.

Tip: Common fix: "C:N calculator" apps help ratio-check.

Step 20: Celebrate and Scale Up

What to do: Share your first batch with neighbors; plan a bigger system next season.

Why it matters: Reinforces the joy—composting is addictive!

Tip: Track savings (e.g., \$50/year on fertilizer) to motivate. Congrats on your black gold!

Your 4x4' compost corner is now a mini-factory of soil magic. Start with Step 1 today, and in months, you'll have endless free fertilizer. Dive into local composting groups for hands-on tips.

Happy decaying!



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