

Having a yard and a garden makes composting much more convenient. But limited space is only one potential roadblock that could stand between you and your composting goals. Busy schedules, along with fears of rodents and icky smells, can lead many homeowners to put off setting up a composting system. Have no fear, aspiring composter! You could have your system up and running with a little education and a weekend's worth of work.

## TIPS FOR COMPOSTING WITH A YARD

# STANDARD BACKYARD

## PILE HOW IT WORKS

According to the EPA, backyard, or “onsite,” composting is suitable for converting yard trimmings and food scraps into compost that can be applied on site (read: in your garden or backyard landscaping). This method should not be used to compost animal products, including meat, eggs and dairy.

As with all types of composting, there are two types of waste you’re dealing with: green and brown waste. Green waste is rich in nitrogen and includes all food waste and anything green from the yard. Brown waste is more carbon-based and includes any paper, wood materials and anything brown from the yard. The key to successful compost in any scenario is a balance of brown and green waste.

The conversion of organic material to compost can take up to two years in a standard backyard pile, but manual turning and aerating can yield fresh compost in as little as six months, according to the EPA.

### PROS

Standard backyard compost piles require very little maintenance or equipment. Once you set up your pile, it becomes as easy as adding food scraps and yard waste every few days and manually turning the pile every few weeks.

Climate and seasonal variations don’t present major challenges to backyard composting because this method typically involves small amounts of food waste. When conditions change, the process can be adjusted accordingly without any major complications. To keep your pile healthy all year round, check out our tips for composting in the spring, summer and winter months.

### CONS

Improper maintenance of your backyard pile can cause odors or attract unwanted pests like insects or animals, but most of these troubles are avoidable. If you’ve noticed funky odors or pests, consult our handy guide for troubleshooting your backyard compost pile. If pests are a persistent problem in your area, you may want to consider another method to keep unwelcome critters away from your compost.

Slow decomposition is another problem you may encounter with standard backyard piles. Turning your pile every few weeks and making sure it has an equal balance of green and brown waste will hasten decomposition, but expect to wait at least six months before your pile yields fresh compost.

**BEST SUITED FOR:**  
HOMES WITH LARGE YARDS AND FEW PEST PROBLEMS

## HOW IT WORKS

Worms will eat almost anything you’d put in a typical compost pile, including food scraps, paper and yard trimmings. To put it simply: When worms eat organic waste, it is excreted in the form of nutrient-rich fertilizer.

“Vermicompost,” a mixture of decomposing food, bedding and castings (worm manure), is the highest quality compost you can make. The process also produces “worm tea,” a high-quality liquid fertilizer for house plants or gardens.

Vermicomposting requires little maintenance and equipment. Ready-made worm bins are available at many retailers and garden centers, or if you’re feeling ambitious, you can also build a worm bin yourself to save on cash. Then, simply add your worms and bedding to get the composting process started.

# OUTDOOR VERMI-COMPOSTING

### PROS

Vermicompost is much more fertile than products of other composting methods. Vermicomposting is also extremely cost-effective: Worms can eat about half their body weight in food scraps each day and have a life span of up to 20 years. Once you get your worm bin started, maintaining it will only take about five minutes each day.

Worm bins also take up very little space and, if maintained properly, shouldn’t smell—making them a viable composting option for homes, condominiums and apartments with shared yards. Just remember to talk to your neighbors, homeowners association or landlord before getting started.

### CONS

Since this method requires you to deal with more than 1,000 live worms, vermicomposting is definitely not for the squeamish. Keeping your worms alive can also prove to be challenging, as these composting critters are highly sensitive to variations in climate. If you plan to keep your worm bin outdoors, set it up in a shady spot to keep the interior temperature between 55 and 77 degrees Fahrenheit, the ideal range for vermicomposting, according to the EPA.

**BEST SUITED FOR:**  
HOMES WITH SMALL YARDS; HOMES OR APARTMENTS WITH SHARED YARDS

## HOW IT WORKS

Decomposition can take a while in standard backyard compost piles. Manually aerating, or turning, your compost pile accelerates decomposition, but that can often mean a lot of work in the yard. If you’re pressed for time, consider opting for a compost tumbler system instead.

Simply place your food scraps and yard trimmings into a rotating barrel the same way you would a standard compost pile, keeping a balance between green and brown waste. When it comes time to turn your compost, simply rotate the barrels rather than manually aerating with a shovel or pitchfork. To keep pests at bay, avoid tossing animal products, such as meat, eggs and dairy, into your compost tumbler.

Compost should be turned once every few weeks, and water should be added about once each week. Pre-made tumbler systems are available for purchase at most garden retailers, but you can also make your own to save on cash and virgin resources.

### PROS

Compost tumblers makes it quick and easy to aerate your compost pile, accelerating decomposition and controlling other common composting problems. Since barrel composting systems are elevated off the ground, they do not attract pests like standard compost piles do.

Compost tumblers are also much less intrusive than a standard pile, making them fantastic options for shared yards. Just remember to talk to your neighbors and landlord before setting up your system.

### CONS

Compost tumblers can often become too moist, as the vessel is sealed and water cannot seep out as it does from standard compost piles. If your compost gets too wet, it will often develop foul odors—even if you don’t toss animal products into the bin.

If you start to notice a funky smell coming from your tumbler, stop adding water for a few days to allow the unit to dry out. In rainy and humid seasons, add less water to avoid a stinky situation.

**BEST SUITED FOR:**  
HOMES AND APARTMENTS WITH SMALL OR SHARED YARDS; AREAS WITH FREQUENT PEST PROBLEMS

## WHY COMPOST?

If recycling hasn’t kept your household trash cans as empty as you expected, food waste is likely to blame. The EPA estimates that each American throws away an average of 1.3 pounds of food scraps daily. Composting allows you to recapture these resources and reuse them as fertilizer in your own garden or another garden in your community—keeping loads of useful materials out of the landfill.

Composting is also one of the most personally satisfying ways to recycle. Think of it this way: Unlike sending that plastic bottle to the recycling plant, you get to watch this natural recycling process every step of the way—deepening your connection with Mother Nature.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON LIVING A GREENER LIFE, PLEASE VISIT [EARTH911.COM](http://EARTH911.COM).

If you live in an apartment or don't have a yard, composting can seem next to impossible. But it's actually much easier than you'd think. Thanks to in-vessel composting systems, you can recycle your organic waste even when space is at a premium. From kitchen composting to worm bins on the balcony, here's how to choose the in-vessel composting system that suits your lifestyle best.

## TIPS FOR COMPOSTING WITHOUT A YARD

# IN-VESSEL COMPOSTING

## HOW IT WORKS

Rather than using worms or a combination of nitrogen- and carbon-rich materials to decompose food scraps, Bokashi composting systems use bran inoculated with anaerobic bacteria, which don't require oxygen, to ferment the waste.

Designed by a Japanese horticulturalist, the process essentially pickles organic material, which has two significant benefits: The fermenting waste releases no noticeable odor and actually repels flies, rats and other pests, meaning you can use a Bokashi system indoors or outside on your porch or balcony.

Another challenge that inevitably faces the yardless composter is what to do with the leftover compost. If your city doesn't offer curbside pickup for organic waste, start by asking your neighbors, along with local rec centers, churches and school and community gardens, if they could use any extra compost for landscaping and gardening.

And make use of private composting services in your city. Brooklyn-based composting company Bokashi will give you a bucket and some Bokashi bran, pick up the leftovers on a monthly basis and leave you a fresh bucket in return. Recology provides similar services in San Francisco, while composters in Washington D.C. can head to Compost Cab for their pickup needs.

## PROS

Most Bokashi systems, like this one from Gaiam, are small, fast and easy to use. In seven to 14 days, the nutrient-rich matter is ready to be buried in your garden. These innovative systems can also process animal products, such as meat, fish and dairy, in addition to fruit and vegetable scraps—making them ideal for non-vegetarian composters.

## CONS

The end product can seem slightly unappealing. Food scraps will not be broken down but will instead develop a pickled and slightly moldy appearance. After they are fully buried in your garden, the fermented scraps should fully decompose in about two weeks.

**BEST SUITED FOR:**  
YARDLESS HOMES AND APARTMENTS WITH LIMITED SPACE

## HOW IT WORKS

Vermicomposting, also known as "worm composting" or "worm bin composting," utilizes live worms to break down organic material. Red worms—not nightcrawlers or field worms commonly found in gardens—dine on your food scraps and produce high-quality compost called castings.

Worms can process all forms of fruit and vegetable scraps, but avoid placing animal products, such as meat, fish and dairy, into your worm bin. If working properly, a vermicompost bin will not smell. But if you notice an odor or have other problems with your worm bin, check out our guide to troubleshooting your vermicompost system.

# VERMI-COMPOSTING

## PROS

Vermicomposting produces the highest quality compost you can make. And it's speedy, too! One pound of mature worms (approximately 800 to 1,000 worms) can eat up to half a pound of organic material per day. It typically takes three to four months for worms to produce harvestable castings, which can be used as potting soil. Vermicomposting also produces "worm tea," a high-quality liquid fertilizer for house plants or gardens.

## CONS

Even the when the lid of your bin is closed, it's not uncommon for a few adventurous worms to crawl out into your kitchen. Avoid this by placing your worm bin in the basement or laundry room or outside on your porch or balcony.

Keeping your worms alive can also prove to be a challenge. When vermicomposting indoors, providing enough food and bedding is usually all it takes to keep your composting buddies happy. If your bin is outside, keep it in the shade to maintain the bin's optimal temperature—from 55 to 77 degrees Fahrenheit, according to the EPA.

**BEST SUITED FOR:**  
YARDLESS HOMES WITH A BALCONY, BASEMENT, LAUNDRY ROOM OR LARGE KITCHEN

## HOW IT WORKS

Automated composters take the guess-work out of recycling your organic waste. Some models, like this one from NatureMill, can fit comfortably under your kitchen counter for easy composting in even the smallest spaces.

For most automated composters, you simply add your waste, along with composting aids like sawdust pellets and baking soda, and let the machine do the rest. The unit will automatically mix, aerate and moisturize your food scraps for efficient composting. Most units will create fresh compost in less than three weeks.

## PROS

Odors are minimal or nonexistent for most automated composting models. These units are also easy to use and process waste quickly: The NatureMill unit can produce fresh compost in only two weeks. Most automated composters can also process meat and dairy to suit all dietary preferences.

## CONS

Automated systems can get pricey (the largest NatureMill unit costs \$399, plus an extra \$49 for the under-the-counter installation kit). As the name implies, most automated units also require energy. But the good news is, it isn't much. The NatureMill unit requires a mere 5 kilowatt hours of energy per month to create fresh compost.

**BEST SUITED FOR:**  
SMALL URBAN APARTMENTS AND YARDLESS HOMES WITH LIMITED SPACE

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