

HANDY GUIDE TO

Home Composting



Montréal 

Why compost?

To reduce the size of your trash bags.

Composting is an environmentally friendly way of disposing of organic material, which represents 36% of all garbage produced by Montréal households. It's a great way to reduce the amount of materials sent to landfills and the number of garbage trucks on our streets and highways.

To improve soil fertility.

Compost helps plants grow by adding extra humus to the soil. When used as an organic conditioner, composted materials stimulate the activity of micro-organisms that release nutrients into the soil.

What is composting?

Composting is a simple solution to recycling organic material by returning it to the soil from which it came, in the form of compost, an excellent addition to your garden.

Whether you live in a multi-unit dwelling or a house with a garden, you can reduce the size of your trash bags by recycling organic material from your kitchen, garden and elsewhere around the house. **Home composting** is a great way to help the environment.

To make sure that your **home composting** is successful, it's best to use only organic materials from plants. Otherwise your compost could give off strong odours and attract neighbourhood animals.



The container

In the city, it's best to use a container with a lid, like the **home composters** available from the City of Montréal, suitable for composting organic materials. No matter what type you chose, the important thing is to follow the basic rules.

There are various types of home composters on the market, some made of plastic and others of wood. You can even make your own composter from wooden boards (cedar), recycled plastic boards, bricks, wire fencing, etc.

Where should you compost?

You don't need much room to set up a composter, only about 1 m². This space could be:

- **on your balcony**
- **close to the house**
- **easily accessible from the garden**
- **slightly shaded and out of the wind**
- **not in a depression, where water could accumulate**

How can you tell when your compost is ready?

Your compost should be ready within a few months (4 to 12 months). Outdoor temperatures can slow down or even halt the composting process. In winter, for instance, the material in your composter will decompose very slowly, but activity will pick up again in spring.

Compost that is ready is crumbly and dark brown with no large pieces and has a pleasant earthy smell. You shouldn't be able to recognize any of the organic materials that went into it, except for bits of wood or other material that are slow to break down (which you can simply toss back into the composter).



Home Composter

Dimensions
32.5 (diameter) x 29.5 in.

Black recycled plastic construction

13 ft³ capacity

Cylinder shape, sits directly on the ground



Machine à terre

Dimensions
28 (diameter) x 33 in.

Black recycled plastic construction

10.5 ft³ capacity

Cone shape, sits directly on the ground



Verticille, garden model

Dimensions
28 x 25 x 26 in.

Salvaged wood pallets construction

10 ft³ capacity

Cube shape, sits directly on the ground



Soilsaver

Dimensions
28 x 28 x 32 in.

Black recycled plastic construction

12 ft³ capacity

Box shape, sits directly on the ground



Verticille, balcony model

Dimensions
38 x 16 x 26 in.

Salvaged wood pallets construction

8 ft³ capacity

Rectangular shape, recommended for apartments



Garden Gourmet

Dimensions
22 x 22 x 36 in.

Black recycled plastic construction

10 ft³ capacity

Box shape, sits directly on the ground

What to put into your composter

Kitchen scraps

- fruit and vegetable peelings
- over-ripe fruit and vegetables
- fruit and vegetable trimmings (with a few exceptions)
- bread
- pasta
- rice
- tea bags
- paper coffee filters
- coffee grounds
- egg shells

Yard waste

- dead leaves (small amounts at a time)
- garden trimmings
- straw, hay
- wilted flowers, dead plants
- dirt
- wood chips
- grass clippings (preferably dried)
- small prunings

From around the house

- newspaper (shredded)
- paper towels
- hair
- feathers
- sawdust
- wood ash
- indoor plants and their soil, if you wish

What NOT to put into your composter

- bones
- dairy products
- oil
- avocado, peach and other pits
- cabbage cores
- rhubarb leaves
- meat
- fish
- shells from oysters and other shellfish
- weeds that have gone to seed
- diseased plants or leaves
- material treated with pesticides, herbicides or other chemicals.

Compostable organic materials fall into six categories, depending on three different criteria: their chemical composition, their moisture, and their porosity.

Chemical composition

Material high in carbon, or "browns": this material decomposes very slowly on its own, and sometimes not at all if it is dry (for instance, dead leaves and wood chips).

Material high in nitrogen, or "greens": this material decomposes easily and tends to rot (for instance, grass trimmings and fruit and vegetable kitchen scraps).

Moisture

Wet material: although the water it contains is very useful, on its own such material tends to mat, seal out oxygen, produce unpleasant odours and become slimy (for instance, grass clippings and fruit and vegetable kitchen scraps).

Dry material: will not decompose on its own (for instance, paper and sawdust).

Porosity

Large pieces: will become entangled and create gaps that allow too much air to circulate (for instance, hedge and tree prunings).

Extremely small pieces: compact easily, preventing air circulation (for instance, grass clippings).



A few basic rules

To speed up the composting process

1. Use the right combination of material categories

Most categories of organic materials decompose very slowly on their own. To get the right carbon/nitrogen blend, sufficient moisture and porosity for proper aeration, you need to mix opposite categories or add them in successive thin layers.

2. Aerate/Stir

The micro-organisms that make composting work need oxygen. To ensure proper aeration and prevent rotting, it's best to stir, mix and alternate the different categories of organic materials. This is particularly important when you're just getting started. By stirring the mixture, you'll also avoid having some parts of it become too wet or too dry or having some parts decompose well and others hardly at all.

3. Watch the moisture level

Proper composting requires the right amount of moisture. Too little, and the material will dry out, the micro-organisms will die and the process will stop; too much, and the compost will become anaerobic and start producing unpleasant odours. So it's important to add water if the organic materials are too dry and dirt or dry material if it is too wet.

4. Keep an eye on your compost

The secret to success lies in keeping a close eye on your compost. By checking it carefully and often, you'll be able to tell whether it's too wet or too dry, decomposing too slowly or becoming smelly. Catching any problems early on will allow you to solve them more easily, quickly and effectively.



Using your compost...

... in your vegetable or flower garden

To **aerate the soil**, spread a 1 to 5 cm (1/2 to 2 in.) thick layer of compost, depending on the quality of your soil and your plants' requirements. Scratch the compost into the top 10 cm (4 inches) of soil. Do not seed or plant directly in compost.

... in flower boxes and containers

To **refresh the soil** in outdoor flower boxes, scratch 2.5 cm (1 in.) of compost into the surface. To **enrich the soil** for indoor plants, simply repot them with a mixture of 1/3 potting soil, 1/3 sand and 1/3 compost. This is an ideal mix.

... around perennials

To **suppress weeds and conserve moisture**, spread 2.5 cm (1 in.) of compost around your perennials.

... on lawns

To **renew your lawn**, sprinkle on a fine layer of compost when reseeding. For general **lawn maintenance**, aerate the soil and use a leaf rake to spread a layer of compost no thicker than the height of the grass.

Some suggested readings

Home Composting. The Composting Council of Canada.

The Rodale Book of Composting. New, Revised Edition. Deborah L. Martin and Grace Gershuny, Editors. Emmaus, Pennsylvania: Rodale Press, 1992.

Clean and Green. Creating a healthy home and garden. Régie intermunicipale de gestion des déchets sur l'île de Montréal. June 2000.

Le compostage domestique. Describes the six models available from the City of Montréal, Service de l'approvisionnement, 2002.

Clean Home and Green Garden. Guide to healthy home maintenance and ecological gardening. Ville de Montréal. May 2006





The ecological
way to dispose of
organic materials