



HALE AT HOME

Composting 101

What is composting? Composting is the process of turning biodegradable food waste into strong, healthy, soil. Kid Challenge: What does *biodegradable* mean? Find the definition!

Why is composting important? For two reasons: One, it reduces waste sent to landfills; Two, it provides us with a valuable resource that we can use to grow produce and flowers. Composting is a win-win!

How do I start composting in my kitchen? Use a waterproof container to collect biodegradable kitchen waste. This could be a metal trash can, a plastic bucket, or any household food storage container. Just remember to create holes in the lid: As materials biodegrade, they release gases and moisture that need to escape. They also require oxygen to break down properly. Science Fact: O₂ is the symbol for the most stable form of oxygen. It's what we breathe every day!

What can I put in my compost bin? That depends. To figure it out, you'll need to determine your composting goal. You'll want the right ratio of "greens" to "browns" to create the appropriate nitrogen to carbon ratio. If you want organic soil, you should only add organic waste. It might sound complicated, but it isn't! A quick search on the internet will help you figure it out. And if you're eager to get started, vegetable peels, egg shells, coffee grinds, and tea bags are generally safe to add. Just don't use meat scraps, dairy products, or oils; they can ruin your compost.

My kitchen bin is full. Now what? Head to a porch or back yard. Compost bins like warmth, so pick a nice sunny spot. Empty your scraps into a firmly set in-ground barrel. Or if you lack yard space, toss them into a floating, rotating barrel (a more flexible option that's easily moved and helps the compost break down). If neither of these options works for you, coordinate pick-up service with your city, town, or a private company.

When will all of these gross food scraps become usable soil? Check your compost bin every now and then. It's important to maintain moisture and should be about as damp as a sponge, so add a little water if it's dry. From time to time, use a rake or pitchfork to lightly mix the bin's contents. In a few weeks or months, you'll notice the bottom layer is rich soil. Happy gardening!

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