

# MAKING A SIMPLE WIRE COMPOST BIN

1. You do not need to purchase pre-made composting systems, or build wooden or concrete structures, to have a perfectly efficient compost bin. With a couple of simple tools and some inexpensive wire fencing, you can make as many compost bins as you need. You will want your compost bin to be at least three feet in diameter. For a three foot compost bin, measure out ten feet of wire fencing. If you are making a compost bin that is four feet in diameter, measure out twelve and a half feet of fencing.
2. Use wire cutters or tin snips to cut the fencing. You'll want to cut the cross wires flush with an upright wire so that you don't have any ends sticking out. Cut carefully, and be sure to wear your gloves. The cut wire can be quite sharp.
3. Form the length of wire fencing into a circle. Sometimes when the wire fencing has just been cut from the roll, it seems determined to spring back into a tight little roll. Laying the fencing on the ground, opening it up, and walking back and forth over it a few times will flatten it enough for you to be able to form it into a circle.
4. Fasten the ends of the fencing together. You can use wire, twine, or zip ties to fasten it. To be sure that your compost bin is secure, fasten the ends at the top, middle, and bottom.
5. Set your compost bin in place by pushing the wire a couple inches into the ground, so that it can stand upright. You can add posts to give it more stability if necessary (an old mop stick will do). The best place for a compost bin is near the garden, where it will be easy to put yard waste into the bin, as well as put finished compost into the garden. Just make sure you have enough room to move around it for those times you need to turn it or harvest the compost. You can cover your bin with tarpaulin to promote decomposition and discourage pests.



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JAMAICA ENVIRONMENT TRUST

COMPOSTING

101

## What is composting?

Composting is the biological decomposition of biodegradable (organic) solid waste into a humus like substance by various micro-organisms including bacteria, fungi in the presence of oxygen. It is sometimes described as nature's way of recycling.

## What to compost?

Organic waste is the best raw material to make compost from. This can be derived from your garden or kitchen or home/office/school in general. Composts work best if it is 'fed' with a mix of green (nitrogen rich) and brown (carbon rich) materials.

Greens	Browns	Put these in
<i>Provide nitrogen and protein for the microbes in your compost pile</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Raw fruit and vegetable scraps</li> <li>Coffee grounds</li> <li>Tea bags</li> <li>Egg shells</li> <li>Houseplant cuttings</li> <li>Fresh grass clippings</li> </ul>	<i>Source of carbon and energy for the microbes</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dried grass</li> <li>Shredded newspaper</li> <li>Woodchips</li> <li>Twigs and branches</li> <li>Sawdust</li> <li>Corn cobs and husks</li> </ul>	
Don't Compost		Keep these out
Meat/Fish and bones Dairy Products Oils and fats Sauces Diseased plants Pet manure Ash (coal or charcoal) Coloured paper Non-biodegradable material		

## BENEFITS OF

### ENHANCING THE SOIL

Composting reduces the need for chemical fertilizers, increases nutrient and water retention, improves aeration and adds beneficial organisms to your soil.

### REDUCING WASTE

Approximately 60 percent of total waste produced by Jamaicans is organic. If we all composted, the savings in both amount of material sent to the dump, and the cost to get it there, would be significant



# HOW TO COMPOST

1. First select a suitable location. A good option is close to your garden/farm, with shade and a water source
2. Make your pile no smaller than 3' x 3' x 3'. In fact, this is probably the perfect size. It's sufficient enough to "cook" your waste and transform it into compost, but not so large that it will become unmanageable and hard to turn.
3. **Lay a base.** Start with a layer of browns, laying down 4-6 inches of twigs or other coarse carbons on the bottom of the pile for good air circulation.
4. **Alternate greens and browns.** Add layers of nitrogen and carbon materials. Make layers about 4-6 inches thick. Once you turn the pile the first time, these materials will get mixed together and compost more efficiently.
5. **Size does matter.** Most materials will decompose faster if they are broken or chopped into smaller pieces, as it makes more surface area available to your composters and water.
6. **Water as you go.** Your compost pile should be moist, kind of like a wrung-out sponge. Squeeze a handful of compost; if small beads of water appear between your fingers, you have enough water. Your pile will get water from rain, as well as the moisture in the greens — for example, fresh grass clippings are nearly 80% water by weight. If the pile gets too wet, you can turn it more frequently to dry it, or add more dry brown materials to soak up the excess moisture.
7. **Mix it up.** As the organic materials decompose, your pile will get hot on the inside and you might see some steam. In about a week, your compost will be ready for turning. Use a pitchfork or shovel to mix up the layers of green and brown and move materials toward the centre of the pile. You can empty your bin and re-layer, or just work materials around inside the bin. Break up clumps of material and wet the pile as needed.
8. **Repeat until it's complete.** The composting process can be pretty quick in the hot months. Your compost pile may no longer heat up after just a few weeks. Look in your pile for finished compost — material that is dark and crumbly, fresh-smelling, and no longer looks like what you originally put in your bin

## IMPORTANT TO NOTE

### MOISTURE

The microbes that do your dirty work in the compost pile require water for survival, but it can be hard to judge how much water to add and when. Too much water means your organic waste won't decompose and you'll get a slimy and smelly pile that could well answer to the name "swamp thing." Too little water and you'll kill the bacteria and you won't get your compost. In general your compost should be moist, but not sopping wet. If you get a lot of rain, build a roof over the pile. This can be as simple as a tarp. Too much water in the pile will slow down the process and can also make it slimy and icky.

### AERATION

Oxygen is also required by many of the microorganisms responsible for successful composting. Give them adequate ventilation and they will take care of the rest. You can make sure that the bacteria in your compost gets sufficient air by turning the pile often and well. Use a pitch fork, spade or compost aerator to mix your pile. If you have a compost tumbler, you've got it easy. Just crank that lever. If you don't aerate your compost, it will break down slowly, resulting in a slimy, dense, stinky pile. It's also a good idea to turn the contents since it rearranges the decaying material. With a little care, you can move the less decomposed material on the edges to the middle of the pile to heat up.

### TEMPERATURE

As they eat, the organisms responsible for composting generate large amounts of heat, which raise the temperature of the pile or compost bin and speeds up decomposition. A compost pile that is working well will produce temperatures of 140-160 degrees Fahrenheit. At these temperatures almost all weed seeds and plant diseases are killed. A "very hot" compost pile will generate temperatures of up to 170 degrees Fahrenheit for up to a week or more.

As organic material in a compost pile heats up it breaks down and takes up less space. A compost pile can shrink up to 70% as it "cooks."

### SOURCES

- <http://www.composting101.com/what-to-use.html>
- <http://earth911.com/news/2010/04/26/the-next-wave-in-composting/>
- [http://www.unep.or.jp/ietc/publications/spc/solid\\_waste\\_management/Vol\\_1/14-Chapter8.pdf](http://www.unep.or.jp/ietc/publications/spc/solid_waste_management/Vol_1/14-Chapter8.pdf)
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