Worm Composting

And other methods for recycling fruit and vegetable trimming

Recycle your Food Scraps Indoors or out. Its fun it's smart.

It's recycling.

Our Home, Our City, Our Planet

Why compost?

Composting is an easy way of recycling. It breaks down waste to turn your fruit, vegetable and yard trimming into a dark, earthy, sweet-smelling soil.

Composting:
- Helps garden and house plants by improving the fertility and health of your soil.
- Saves water by helping the soil hold moisture and reducing water runoff.
- Benefits the environment by recycling valuable organic resources and extending the life of our landfill.
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Compost Do's and Don'ts

Do compost:
- All fruit and vegetable trimmings
- Coffee grounds and filters
- Tea bags
- Citrus rinds
- Rinsed-out, crushed eggshells
- Used toilet paper
- Soft green plant trimmings

Don't compost:
- Meat, bones and fish
- Dairy products and grease
- Grains, beans and breads
- Dog, cat and bird feces
- Sawdust from plywood or treated wood
- Woody pruning (in closed-air system, worm bins, or underground)

Basic Composting

- Some time and effort
- Requires some yard space
- No composting necessary in the yard directly

Simply bury fruit and vegetable trimmings at least one foot under the soil surface once a week. This requires a 6" layer of compostable material on top of the fruit and vegetables. For best results, dig your hole in a different place each week. You can plant fruits and vegetables that like lettuce immediately. Once the compost is ready, you can plant deeper-rooted plants (like most root vegetables), or bury more compostable material in the same place.

Remember:
- Composting fruit and vegetable trimmings requires special care. To avoid rodents, flies, and bad odor, just follow the simple guidelines in this brochure. Also, the Health Department requires rodent-resistant systems. Use a container with a lid, a floor, and holes big enough to hold at least one foot of compost under it.

Resources

More Composting Brochures
- Basic Composting
- Compost Education Center

Compost Education Center
- Simply Bury Compost: Garden for the Environment at 7th Ave. and Lawton. It features compost bins and how-to signs. Open all daylight hours.

Free Workshops:
- Sign up for our urban composting workshop at Garden for the Environment.

Books
- Rodale Book of Composting
- Worms Eat My Garbage

Worm Sources
- Cole Hardware in San Francisco, (415) 647-8700
- Sonoma Valley Worm Farm, (800) 447-6996
- The Rotline (415) 255-4370

The Rotline answers composting questions.

Garden for the Environment
- Office: 491 Hayes Street, 2nd Floor, SF Ca 94110
- (415) 731-5627
- Garden: 7th Avenue @ Lawton Street, SF Ca 94112

SF Environment
- San Francisco Department of the Environment
- 31 Grove St.
- San Francisco, CA 94117
- (415) 355-3700

Our Home, Our City, Our Planet
Worm Composting

• Most fun! More time and effort
• Very compact – indoors or out
• Produces small amounts of excellent fertilizer

Getting Started

1. Choose a Bin
Buy a bin, or build one out of wood, plastic, an old dresser drawer, shipping crate, or barrel.

2. Pick a Place
Locate your bin where it will not freeze or overheat– in a pantry, kitchen corner, laundry room, garbage, basement, patio, deck, or in your garden.

3. Make a worm bed
Worms like to live under lots of moist paper or leaves. This helps keep them cool and moist, gives them fiber to eat, and prevents fruit flies from getting to them. The bedding needs to be kept moist. You can also add in as bedding. Sprinkle bedding with a few handfuls of soil. Do not use glossy paper or magazines.

4. Adopt Some Worms
Compost worms are often called “red wigglers” or “red worms.” They are different from earthworms who live underground. You can find compost worms in a compost pile, get them from a friend who vermishes, or buy them from a mail order or in the back of this brochure. Start with one half to one pound per 2 square feet.

5. Feed Worms Their First Meal
Start your worms off with about a quart of fruit and vegetable trimmings (see “Do’s and Don’ts” section). Then leave them alone for a couple of weeks while they get used to their new home.

Maintaining Your Worm Bin

Feed Your Worms about a quart (one pound) of food scraps per square foot of surface area in your bin per week. To avoid fruit flies and odors, always bury food under bedding. Do not feed your worms anything that spoils in 4 days, including meat.

Add Fresh Bedding every 1-3 months. Always keep a layer of fresh bedding over the worms and food in your bin.

Keep bedding moist as a wrung out sponge. A plastic bin allows moisture to escape while a wood bin requires adding water occasionally.

Worm Bin Troubleshooting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Causes</th>
<th>Solutions</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Worm are dying</td>
<td>Rodent or bird eating</td>
<td>Harvest compost, add fresh bedding and food</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Toxicity</td>
<td>Activate water until slightly damp</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Excessive temperature</td>
<td>Move bin to less hot location</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dehydration</td>
<td>Add 4&quot;-6&quot; layer of bedding and fresh food for 2-3 weeks</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-compostables present</td>
<td>Remove food, pet feces, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Seaweed, dead leaves</td>
<td>These are good for your worms!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Harvesting & Using Worm Compost

Harvest your compost at least once a year to keep your worms healthy. You can start composting 3-4 months after you set up your bin. Simply mix your compost into the new or old compost, water it well, and let it sit for a few weeks to allow the compost to finish before you plant.

Closed Air Composting

• Low maintenance, some setup required
• More room than small bin
• Produces small amounts of compost infrequently

Getting Started

You can buy a closed air compost kit or make your own. Find a spot with good drainage, dig a hole, and bury the bottom 12-18" of the bin. Be sure to pack the soil firmly around the edges.

Feeding
Feed your closed air composter no more than once per week. Add a quarter inch of food per bin per week. Always close the bin tightly after feeding. Water at least once a month as the compost is biodegrading. Do not add fruit flies, or household garbage. If it fills up too fast, let it sit for a few weeks. Never add urine. The compost must be rotating to achieve compost.

Harvesting & Using
When your container is full (after 6-8 months), let it sit for 6-20 more months before collecting the finished compost. When you are ready to collect, start mixing in a 4"-6" layer of finished compost into garden soil before planting or spread it as a mulch around shrubs and trees.

Problems?
If your closed air compost kit has flies and/or insect larvae, add a 4"-6" layer of dry soil and stop feeding for 4-6 weeks.