

GARDENING GUIDE 02

Composting 101

Turn kitchen scraps and yard waste into free, nutrient-dense soil for your garden.

A publication of Global One Urban Farming · Kansas City, MO

What compost actually is

Compost is what happens when microbes, worms, and fungi break down organic material into a dark, crumbly substance that smells like the forest floor. It feeds your soil, holds moisture, and cuts your household waste roughly in half.

The greens-and-browns rule

Healthy compost needs a rough balance of nitrogen-rich "greens" and carbon-rich "browns." Aim for one part greens to three parts browns by volume.

- Greens: fruit and vegetable scraps, coffee grounds, tea bags, grass clippings, plant trimmings
- Browns: dry leaves, shredded cardboard, newspaper, straw, sawdust from untreated wood
- Never add: meat, dairy, oils, pet waste, or anything glossy or plastic-coated

Pick a system

Backyard bin

A 3×3-foot bin made from pallets or hardware cloth works for most families. Turn the pile with a pitchfork once every two weeks.

Tumbler

A sealed rotating drum keeps pests out and finishes compost in as little as six weeks. Best for small yards.

Worm bin (vermicompost)

A stacked plastic tote with red wigglers fits under a kitchen sink and processes several pounds of scraps a week.

Troubleshooting

Smells bad?

Too many greens. Add browns and turn the pile.

Nothing happening?

Too dry, or pieces too big. Water it until it feels like a wrung-out sponge, and chop scraps small.

When it's ready

Finished compost is dark, crumbly, and no longer resembles its ingredients. It's ready in three to six months for a hot pile, six to twelve for a cold one. Spread a one-inch layer on your garden beds every spring and fall.