

Composting 101



Since we are all staying at home for the next 30 days, it is the perfect time to start composting. Your family's trash can be easily and inexpensively turned into organic plant food. About 30% of what we throw away can be used to make your own rich fertilizer.

We have been composting here at Bella Terra for a long time. The main reason is that we have a lot of yard waste and food scraps. And lately, having more people at home = more trash! It is one of the best ways you can personally reduce your carbon footprint. Plus with minimal effort, you will end up with the most beautiful black enriched soil imaginable.



The Browns

What you need to compost

You need "browns" and "greens" and water to compost properly. The browns are dead leaves and twigs and branches. The greens are your fruit scraps, grass clippings, vegetable waste, coffee grounds, and egg shells. Your compost pile should have an equal amount of browns to greens. You should also alternate layers of organic materials of different-sized particles.



The brown materials provide carbon for your compost, the green materials provide nitrogen, and the water provides moisture to help break down the organic matter.

What NOT to compost

According to the [Environmental Protection Agency \(EPA\)](#), here is a list of items you should *not* compost:

- Black walnut tree leaves or twigs
 - Releases substances that might be harmful to plants
- Coal or charcoal ash
 - Might contain substances harmful to plants
- Dairy products (e.g., butter, milk, sour cream, yogurt) and eggs*
 - Create odor problems and attract pests such as rodents and flies
- Diseased or insect-ridden plants
 - Diseases or insects might survive and be transferred back to other plants
- Fats, grease, lard, or oils*
 - Create odor problems and attract pests such as rodents and flies
- Meat or fish bones and scraps*
 - Create odor problems and attract pests such as rodents and flies
- Pet wastes (e.g., dog or cat feces, soiled cat litter)*
 - Might contain parasites, bacteria, germs, pathogens, and viruses harmful to humans
- Yard trimmings treated with chemical pesticides
 - Might kill beneficial composting organisms



How We Compost

There are many different ways to compost at home, but I want to share with you how we do it. First, we gather the greens in a designated trash can located in the kitchen island. Here is where I dump our vegetable peels and fruit scraps, egg shells, and dead cut flowers. Since we recycle our Nespresso pods I do

not have any coffee grounds to add. We fill this bin every few days and it gets taken to the compost area. When the kitchen shredder can is full, we add the paper scraps to the composter too.



In addition, once or twice a year, we shovel the top layer of the soil in the hen house and add it to the composter, to capture the goodness of chicken manure.



Composting Methods

We have two different composting methods. First we have two [ComposTumblers](#) . Granted these are a financial investment, but we've had them for years and they are still functioning just fine. These very large barrels make composting easy. You load the barrels, turn it a few times per day and in 14 days you have compost (weather and other factors may affect speed in decomposition). There are smaller barrels available from various companies like [Walmart](#) , [Amazon](#) and [Wayfair](#), too.



We also have a hand made stationary bin that has 3 divided areas. The browns and greens are added to the bin and then moved as they progress to make space for newer compostable items. These bins are covered to contain any odor or keep pests away. A good compost pile shouldn't smell. If it does it is not getting enough oxygen and the contents are just rotting. The compost needs to be aerated and turned frequently (with a pitch fork or shovel) to help with the decomposition.



Plus we cover the compost pile after aerating it. Since the decomposition process creates heat, the tarp keeps the heat in

and any critters out. Naturally, during the summer the decomposition process is accelerated.



The benefits

We produce enough compost to fertilize the garden, supplement the soil at the base of the trees in the orchard and the planting beds. This soil is moist and smells so good and earthy.

What better way to help our planet and reduce our waste? It is a remarkable feeling to know we all can make soil from our trash. Think about that for a moment. I find it astounding!

Part of our gardening success is definitely attributed to having such incredible, nutrient-rich soil. Here is how my garden looks today.



Massive hollyhocks

Last April, I did a blog post on hollyhocks and offered free seeds. Click [here](#) for the post, but if anyone wants hollyhock seeds, please email me at marycrz@cox.net.



I strongly encourage you to consider composting. There are so many resources on the internet to help you establish a process that is suitable for your needs. You will be so delighted with the results.

If you are already composting, please let me know how you do it. Happy April Fool's Day! Are you playing any pranks? This reminds me to put some blue food coloring in the milk carton! Have a lovely day.

Mary