

# Basic Composting | Loving Natures Garden



Leah's Compost Bowl, June 2010

*Today's post is by guest Leah McClellan who writes at [Peaceful Planet](#).*

**All you need to start composting is a bowl.**

That's right, a bowl. A bucket would do just as well, or a plastic milk jug with the top cut off. Even an old coffee canister will work.

You can buy cute little ceramic compost keepers—in your choice of designer colors—but really, we're talking about basic composting, and all you need is a bowl to get started. Oh, and a garden of some sort.

## Composting is not Complicated

Composting isn't complicated, though countless methods have been developed for turning kitchen scraps and garden waste into rich soil. Some work faster than others and take up less space—and are much prettier—than the way I do it. But if you're busy like I am, or if you're new to composting, you'll want to keep things easy.



Leah's Active Compost Pile, June 2010

## How to Start Basic Composting

Choose two locations for “compost piles.” These can be out-of-the way spots behind a shed or garage or in a corner of your vegetable garden.

*Do be sure to check for local regulations before finalizing your compost location – some cities and neighborhoods stipulate factors such as the distance your compost must be from a fence boundary.*

How much space you need depends of how many scraps your kitchen produces and how many grass clippings or leaves you typically have or can get. If your yard and garden are small, keep your compost piles small. Each of mine are about 3 feet (1 meter) square.

The first pile is for immediate use. The second pile will be active while you let the first pile rest, so you don't need to

start the second one right away; just plan on a location.



Leah's Maturing Compost, June 2010

## How to Contain Your Compost

A good compost pile can be a simple heap of kitchen scraps and yard debris. I've done it that way a few times, and it works just fine.

If you prefer things a bit tidy, you can build a simple structure. Pound a few stakes into the ground in a square, rectangular, or circular shape and wrap some flexible fencing around them.

“Chicken wire” is great, but any kind of metal fencing with small gaps will work (the smaller the better to keep some things in and other things—like rabbits—out).

***Before you pound anything into the ground, locate your utilities. Hitting a power cable would be quite a shock!***

Metal stakes are easier to pound into the ground than wood, plus they're stronger and will last longer. But almost anything will do: 1×3 or 2×4 lumber cut into points at one end, even old wooden or plastic tomato stakes are fine. Just don't use pressure-treated wood because of the potential for chemicals to leach out.

Be sure to sink most of the stakes a foot or so into the ground, so it's sturdy. How tall, how wide, and how sturdy it needs to be depends on how much you plan to put in it and how long you want it to last. Basic here, remember?



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## What to Compost

Here's where your bowl comes into play. In the kitchen, put vegetable and fruit peels, seeds, stems, and cores in it. Corn husks. Coffee grounds. Eggshells.

Empty the bowl in the compost pile and cover with lawn clippings, weeds, or dead plants (if not diseased). Small twigs or branches and autumn leaves are great.

Ask neighbors for their lawn clippings and mowed or raked-up leaves if you don't have much of your own. Make sure they don't use herbicides, pesticides, or chemical fertilizers if you want to stay as natural as possible.

## Do Not Compost These

Never use meat, fish, or animal products of any kind (except egg shells) because it will attract flies and other critters that you probably don't want. Skip prepared foods, too, like salad with dressing or cooked vegetables with sauce.

Stick with raw fruit and veggie scraps for best results. Coffee filters or the occasional paper napkin are just fine (you can even line your bowl with old newspaper or a brown paper bag and dump it right in the pile).

## How to Care for Your Compost

It's great to turn the pile over once in awhile, to mix things up, but you don't have to. Layering is good too. Keep grass clippings or dried leaves handy to cover the veggie and fruit scraps. A few twigs or thick-stemmed weeds added here and there help with ventilation (which aids in decomposition), and an occasional watering during a summer dry spell is helpful.



Leah's Compost is Ready, June 2010

## How to Know When Your Compost is Ready

I'm working with a yearly system, give or take a few months. I stop adding new material to my first pile in the spring, and I start adding to the second.

By the time mid-summer or fall rolls around, the compost is ready in the first pile.

Simple compost can be ready in as little as a few months. It depends on how many scraps you have, temperature, moisture, and other variables.

To check, just poke around with a shovel. If it looks like dirt with nothing squishy, it's ready. You might find a stray corn cob or an eggshell, but that's OK. Just rake through and put twigs or anything else not decayed into your other compost pile.

If you find more sticky muck than crumbly soil, then you probably need to add more grass clippings or leaves in

thinner layers and decrease the amount of moisture. Just turn things over, maybe dig into the soil a little for drainage, stir in some grass and leaves, and check back in a few weeks. Or months. There's no hurry.

## How to Use Your Beautiful Compost

You can rake the finished compost around the vegetable garden at any time of the year. Or dig it into your flower beds or anywhere your garden needs a boost. Tomato plants just love some rich compost in their holes when you first set them out.

When your first compost pile is emptied, it's time to start it over again and let the second pile rest until it's ready. And then repeat the process.

As long as you have a bowl and at least a small yard or garden, you can start composting. Instead of putting those valuable kitchen scraps in the trash, enrich your garden the natural way by making some organic compost. And instead of bagging leaves and grass clippings, just dump them in the compost pile like I do. Composting really is that easy.



*Leah McClellan is a freelance writer, part-time English instructor, gardener, vegetarian, and animal lover who dreams of world peace and writes about communication. Visit Leah at [Peaceful Planet](#).*

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