

Domestic composting — philosophical considerations

Questions and reflections

What is my primary motivation for composting?

- ☼ Reducing my waste and joining the growing movement of “responsible citizens seeking a more ecological lifestyle” .
- ☼ Producing my own economical, ecological soil conditioner for my flowerbeds, lawn and vegetable garden (or as a gift, if I don’t have flowerbeds, a lawn or vegetable garden).
- ☼ A combination of the two, but in what proportion...?

How much organic matter do I produce daily?

- ☼ I am a vegetarian and every day, I eat a lot of different fruits and vegetables, including watermelon, pineapple, pumpkin, squash and corn, all foods that generate considerable waste.
- ☼ I eat enough fruits and vegetables to generate, on average, sufficient waste to fill a 750 g yogurt container
- ☼ There are just two of us, so we generate little organic waste.

A balance of time/energy/personal needs: a guarantee of long-term success

Your answer to these two questions will determine the amount of time and energy you will choose to spend on composting. Remember that nature does things well, and on its own...

If you want to compost for the sole purpose of reducing the volume of waste you produce, even if results could take up to two years: add your peels every 3 to 4 days and forget about the compost, doing just enough maintenance to avoid odours.

If you are composting in order to harvest compost once or twice a year, you would do well to monitor its development, to find the perfect mix, to water and stir it, and to add everything you haven’t consumed, down to the last seed: more daily maintenance required, with peak periods in the spring and fall.

Obviously, there is a wide range of time and energy between these two extremes. **You** decide how much you are willing to put in.

You would do well to start off slowly, working this activity into your daily routine, rather than starting out strong, losing control and ending up giving your composter to your neighbour by the fall..

You might also decide not to put everything in the composter from one day to the next. Remember that, until now, all of this organic matter had gone out with the garbage. Take the time to adjust to this new approach, to work it into your daily routine, and most importantly, to balance the contents of your compost! Before long, questions and uncertainty will give way to expertise and pride!

Turn your first harvest into a celebration: in the spring or fall, bring together the ones who contributed to the production of your homegrown compost!

The ABCs of domestic composting

1. What is compost?

It is a biologically stable and hygienic soil conditioner, rich in humus, resulting from the biochemical conversion of putrescible organic waste decomposed by microorganisms and aerobic organisms.



2. What is a composter?

Quite simply, it is a unit that accelerates and controls the work of nature. In nature, everything decomposes, layer by layer. The same thing occurs in the composter.

3. Installing the Earth Machine: (see pamphlet provided with the composter.)

Tip 1: assemble the composter upside down. This will make it easier for you to see the tabs and ensure that they are lined up with the slots before assembling.

Tip 2: when you turn the sod or loosen the soil to allow the microorganisms to move up into the composter, remove approximately 6 inches of sod around the composter and replace with mulch, to avoid having tall grass (soil enriched by the organic matter in the composter) that is difficult to mow around the composter. **To start:** build a nest of twigs and branches to a height of 5 inches, then add soil and dead leaves. The composter is now ready to receive your organic matter.

4. It's all a matter of balance

Matter → Water, moisture ↔ Air, oxygen ↔ Microorganisms

Tip: 1 part green for 2 parts brown

| Nitrogen-rich matter (greens, moist matter) | Carbon-rich matter (browns, dry matter) | Non-compostable matter (or for use in low quantities) |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Fruit waste – raw, cooked Vegetable waste – raw, cooked Cooking water Fresh grass clippings Ripe manure Egg shells Algae | Dry leaves Newspaper (if no leaves available) Straw, hay Sawdust Coffee grounds with filter Tea bags Paper napkins Pasta, bread, rice Nut shells Pits Natural fabrics Hair, nails Bird litter, feathers Animal hair Dead plants and dried flowers Earth | Weed seeds Wood ash Lime BBQ briquettes Meat and fish Bones Oil and fat Dairy products Human and animal waste Vacuum cleaner dust Rhubarb leaves Treated wood Diseased plants or leaves Large quantity of soaked materials in a single layer |

Source: Nova Envirocom, *Le compostage facilité*, 2006

5. How to collect the compost?

A- For those wishing to maximize the production and use of compost: **In the fall:** remove the composter and move it closer to the house; cover the uncovered heap with a plastic tarp and let it ripen throughout the winter. Stirred a few times as soon as it thaws, this compost will be ready to use early in the spring (April). **In the spring** (early April): turn over compost stacked near the house all winter, alternating with brown matter, and pile it up next to the composter that has been put back in the yard. Turned over once or twice and covered with a plastic tarp, this compost will be ready in 3 months (end of June). The empty composter can then be filled normally with fresh matter from the kitchen as of April, and the cycle can start anew.

B- For sporadic use (those who are in no hurry), you open the door and serve yourself. This can go on for years!

6. Using compost

In the spring, you can spread ripe compost on flowerbeds, the lawn, the vegetable garden. You can mix it with repotting soil for indoor plants. As a rule, it is preferable to spread young compost late in the fall: it will continue to ripen on the ground and will be perfect for use on most plants in the spring.

7. Useful links

www.novaenvirocom.ca

www.recyc-quebec.gouv.qc.ca

www.compost.org