

GUIDE TO COMPOSTING AT HOME

TOWNS OF SOUTH KINGSTOWN & NARRAGANSETT

REDUCE FOOD WASTE FIRST!

Before we even think about composting, we should first focus on reducing our food waste at home. Americans waste about $\frac{1}{3}$ of their food every year, costing approximately \$728 per person annually. Save money and waste by planning meals, eating leftovers, and storing food properly. Reducing food waste is one of the most powerful individual acts one can take in the fight against climate change.

Sources: <https://www.epa.gov/land-research/estimating-cost-food-waste-american-consumers>
<https://drawdown.org/solutions/reduced-food-waste>

WHY SHOULD WE BE COMPOSTING?

Approximately $\frac{1}{3}$ of the material sent to the landfill could be composted, and RI's only landfill is on track to be full by 2046. Keeping food and yard waste out of the landfill is an essential way to extend the life of the landfill.

Additionally, when compostable material goes to the landfill, it doesn't break down and instead creates methane gas, a powerful greenhouse gas. Compost is a beneficial addition to soil as it adds nutrients and microbiology, sequesters carbon, and increases soil resilience.

IN THE KITCHEN

The type of container you use to collect food scraps in the kitchen doesn't matter, as long as it works well for you. If you're worried about smell, either empty it daily or keep it in the fridge or freezer. Review your scraps to see what you're regularly wasting, and adjust your shopping and cooking habits accordingly.

YARD WASTE

Yard waste like grass clippings, leaves, wood chips, and small branches can be composted. If possible, cut, chip, or mulch the material into smaller pieces to allow for faster decomposition. Keep diseased materials or invasive vines and other plant material out of your backyard bin, and bring it to the transfer station instead.

CHOOSING A SYSTEM

The system you choose for your home depends on the space you have, the material you want to compost, and the time and effort you want to put into it. Bins can be purchased or made by hand. They can be plastic, wood, wire, or sometimes made out of creative repurposed materials. RIRRC sells black plastic bins (bottom left) for \$45 each and many garden centers or hardware stores sell other varieties. If you have a lot of food and yard waste, multiple bins may be helpful. Place your bin on a flat surface, preferably with some tree cover, in a spot that is easily accessible. If wildlife is a concern, clear any brush or tall grass around the bin. Worm bins can work well for those with little to no outdoor space as they don't require yard waste and can be stored indoors.



ALTERNATIVES TO COMPOSTING AT HOME

If you don't want to or can't compost at home, there are alternatives. There are 4 collection bins available at the **Rose Hill Regional Transfer Station** for free drop off. These bins are picked up by the company *Black Earth Compost*. They accept a wide variety of materials including meat, dairy, and compostable plastics. *Black Earth Compost* also offers **curbside collection**.

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BACKYARD BIN

YES

- Veggie & fruit scraps
- Egg shells
- Coffee grounds & filters
- Tea leaves & paper tea bags
- Yard & grass trimmings
- Leaves
- Wood chips & shavings
- Soiled napkins, paper, cardboard

NO

- Meat, fish or bones*
- Eggs or dairy products*
- Fats, oil, or grease*
- Cooked food*
- Diseased or pest infested plant material*
- Weeds and invasive plants*
- Pet waste or cat litter
- Treated or painted wood
- Compostable plastics or bags*

**Items can be composted by Black Earth Compost or other commercial composter*

Backyard composting can be as simple as throwing your food and garden scraps into a pile and walking away. The material will break down, but will take a while. To produce compost faster, you can have an active role in the decomposition process by:

- Chopping materials into smaller pieces
- Layering "Green"/nitrogen materials with "Brown"/carbon materials with a ratio of 1:3.
- Monitoring the moisture levels to be as moist as a wrung out sponge
- Turning piles regularly to aerate and activate microbiology

Issues like smell or slow decomposition arise when the conditions are out of balance. To prevent and solve issues, focus on balancing your nitrogen and carbon materials, turning the pile, and moderating moisture levels by adding water or dry (carbon) materials as needed.

Finished compost can be available in 3-12 months, depending on activity and conditions. Many bins have doors or openings at the base to make accessing the finished compost easier (usually at the bottom of the pile). Compost is ready to be used when it is dark brown, smells like the forest floor, and doesn't have any recognizable pieces. Some choose to sift their compost to remove the larger pieces but it is not necessary.

Learn more about backyard composting at: <https://rirc.org/recycling-composting-disposal/do-it-yourself-composting/food-scrap-composting>

WORM BIN

Composting with worms, or vermicomposting, utilizes worms to decompose organic matter. Their excrement (called castings) is an excellent addition to soil, high in nutrients and beneficial bacteria. Common worms to use are Red Wigglers (*Eisenia fetida*) because they thrive in shallow spaces and moderate temperatures, and eat a lot!

Worm bins can be store bought or homemade as long as they provide a dark, moist environment with airholes for oxygen. Red wigglers prefer temperatures between 40° and 80°F.

Worms eat a diet of mostly raw, fruit and veggie scraps, egg shells, tea leaves, and coffee grounds. Avoid feeding citrus and alliums (onion, garlic, etc) as the oils harm the worms. In optimal conditions, worms eat half their body weight in a day. Feed light at first, and increase food as the population grows. In addition to food, provide a moistened bedding of shredded newspaper or cardboard, coconut coir, or dry leaves.

Worms self regulate their population based on space, food, and conditions.

Harvest the castings by separating the worms from the castings using light or food to draw them away over time, or pick them out by hand.



Learn more about worm composting at: <https://rirc.org/recycling-composting-disposal/do-it-yourself-composting/vermicomposting>

HOW TO USE COMPOST

You only need to add about 10-20% of the bed or pot volume in compost. Mix in a couple inch layer of compost before planting, add a handful in the planting hole, or use it as a mulch around established plants. Compost and worm castings can be use to make a "tea" that can be used as a liquid fertilizer or foliar spray.



Questions?

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