



# Compost and Yard Waste

What can/can't go in my compost bin? • Mulching Grass and Leaves • Composting Services

## What is compost?

Compost is a decayed mixture of plant waste that is used to improve the soil in gardens and yards. You can make compost from yard waste, food waste or both. Yard waste and food waste account for about 20–30 percent of your household's waste stream.

## What's the problem with yard and food waste?

**Landfilling** — When yard waste and **food waste** end up in the landfill they take up space, create water pollution (leachate), and air pollution (methane). In the first two decades after its release, methane is 84 times more potent than carbon dioxide as a greenhouse gas contributing to climate change. Additionally, yard waste is banned from landfills in many parts of the Kansas City region.

**Burning** — Burning yard waste at home is also an unhealthy disposal method; it causes air pollution by releasing carbon dioxide and nitrogen oxide, poses fire hazards and is a nuisance for neighbors.

**Dumping** — Dumping lawn refuse into the street causes a number of problems. Piles of leaves purposely blown into roads can clog storm drains, contributing to flooding risks. And when grass clippings and yard trimmings treated with chemical fertilizers enter storm drains, they are deposited directly into our streams and rivers, posing health risks to people, wildlife and the environment.



## If you have a yard, set up a backyard compost bin

- Select suitable space and size:** Select a dry, shady, or partly shady spot near a water source and preferably out of neighbors' sight. Ideally, the compost area should be at least one cubic yard in size.
- Get a bin or start a pile:** A pile works great for just leaves and grass clippings, but when you want to incorporate food waste, it's time to use a bin to prevent rodents and pets from invading. You can **build your own bin** or purchase one online or at retail locations. You'll also need a kitchen compost bin so you can collect and store your food waste before taking it to your backyard pile.
- Mix it right:** There are four types of ingredients you need to make great compost: browns for carbon, greens for nitrogen, air for organisms and water for moisture. See "What can go in my compost bin?" for a list of green and brown materials you can use. Mix as follows:
  - Add your brown and green materials (generally three parts brown to one part green), making sure larger pieces are chopped or shredded.
  - Every time you add to the pile, turn over and fluff it with a pitchfork or shovel to provide aeration, unless your bin has a turner.
  - During dry weather, add water to keep the pile moist. A good rule-of-thumb is the sponge test: your compost should have the consistency and moisture content of a wrung-out sponge when you squeeze it.



## If you don't have a yard, set up an indoor compost bin

- Get a bin:** Two options for indoor composting are **vermicomposting** and **bokashi** composting. Vermicomposting uses earthworms to convert food waste into compost. Bokashi composting involves fermenting food waste.
- Use it:** If you don't have an outdoor space to use your compost, use it for houseplants, give it to friends and family members, or contact a nearby community garden.

*Note: Vermicomposting and bokashi composting accept limited types of materials. Use only materials recommended.*

## What can go in my compost bin?

### YES\*

- Raw or cooked fruits and vegetables
- Bread and grains
- Coffee grounds and filters
- Grass clippings
- Paper tea bags
- Hair and fur
- Chicken, rabbit, cow and horse manure
- Cotton or wool rags
- Dryer and vacuum cleaner lint
- Eggshells
- Nut shells
- Fireplace ashes (from wood burning)
- Sawdust
- Hay and straw
- Yard trimmings (e.g., leaves, branches, twigs; EXCEPT Black Walnut)



Vermicomposting kit: some assembly required.





- Houseplants
- Used potting soil
- Wood chips
- Shredded newspaper
- Cardboard rolls
- Clean paper

## NO

- Metal
- Glass
- Plastic
- Dairy products
- Fats, grease, lard or oils
- Greasy or oily foods
- Meat or seafood scraps
- Bones and shells
- Pet wastes (e.g., dog or cat feces, soiled cat litter)
- Soiled diapers
- Stickers from fruits or vegetables
- Black walnut tree leaves or twigs
- Yard trimmings treated with chemical pesticides
- Roots of perennial weeds
- Coal or charcoal ash
- Firestarter logs
- Treated, stained or painted wood

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## Mulch your grass and leaves

The best food for your lawn is your lawn and leaves! When you mow your yard, mulch your grass and leaves instead of collecting them for disposal. When done properly, mulched grass and leaves quickly decompose and return nutrients to the soil naturally.

### Benefits:

- Provides a natural lawn fertilizer.
- Saves time and effort bagging.
- Saves money on water, fertilizer, bags and disposal costs.
- Helps prevent weed growth
- Conserves water and protects waterways from runoff pollution.

### How to mulch your grass:

- Cut grass with sharp blade, mulching blade is ideal.
- Cut grass when it's dry.
- Take grass catcher off mower.
- Cut no more than 1/3 of the grass height at any one time.

### How to mulch your leaves:

- Cut leaves with sharp blade, mulching blade is ideal.
- Mulch leaves when they are dry.
- Take grass catcher off mower.
- Set front wheels on highest level (this allows leaves in, but not out).
- Mow over leaves 1-2 times or until leaf clutter is reduced to dime-size pieces.



## Send it off-site

### Food Waste:

- **Drop-off:** You can take your food scraps to:
  - Compost Collective's **Bin Swap Program**
  - KC Can Compost's **residential subscription drop-off program**
  - URBAVORE Urban Farm's **Residential Composting Program**
- **Pickup:** **Compost Collective KC** and **Food Cycle KC** provide curbside food waste pick up. Check to see if they serve your zip code.

### Yard Waste:

- **Drop-off:** Bringing your lawn and garden refuse to a community collection center is another way to divert useful organic material from landfills. Some yard waste drop-off facilities also offer residents opportunities to obtain mulch or compost at low cost. And after the holiday season, many sites also accept old holiday trees. Search **RecycleSpot** to find a center near you.
- **Pickup:** A number of communities offer curbside yard waste collection in addition to regular trash and recycling services. Search by **community** in RecycleSpot to see if your city is one of them (and call to verify). If you don't have municipal leaf and brush curbside collection, there are private companies that also manage lawn refuse. **RecycleSpot** includes a list of many providers; contact them to find out about the costs and procedures.

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**Curbside Pick-Up:** A number of communities offer curbside yard waste collection in addition to regular trash and recycling services. **Search by community in RecycleSpot** to see if your city is one of them (and call to verify). If you don't have municipal leaf and brush curbside collection, there are private companies that also manage lawn refuse. RecycleSpot includes a list of many providers; contact them to find out about the costs and procedures.

**Get Started**

What Do I Do With...?  
Why Recycle?  
FAQs  
At Home  
Beyond The Basics  
At School  
At Work  
In Your Community

**Recycle More**

Earth Day 2021  
Upcoming Events  
Recycle More At Work  
Food Waste  
Reduce & Reuse  
Compost/Yard Waste  
Electronics  
Plastics  
Prescription Drugs  
Spread The Word  
RecycleSpot Blog

**Hazardous Waste**

Missouri Residents  
Kansas Residents  
Businesses And  
Organizations  
Safe Alternatives

**About**

MARC Communities  
Contact Us



MARC does not endorse the businesses and organizations listed at [recyclespot.org](http://recyclespot.org)

Provided as a service of the Solid Waste Management District,  
the Mid-America Regional Council and the Missouri Department of Natural Resources

