

Composting Food Scraps At Home

Properly decomposed food scraps can be turned into a highly nutritious compost for your garden. However, composting food scraps in a regular backyard compost bin can be tricky, as it can attract pests. Fortunately, there are three simple ways to compost food scraps without fear of pests: worm composting, in-ground composting and homemade food digesters.

Please keep in mind that all three of these methods are **ONLY** for composting *vegan materials*, such as fruit and vegetable trimmings, bread, rice, pasta, coffee grounds and other food materials from plants. Animal products (such as meat, fish and dairy), pet waste and greasy food should not be composted at home. These items can attract pests and cause problems in a backyard compost bin. Please place these items in your organics cart instead.

Worm Composting

Vermicomposting, a.k.a., worm composting, uses worms to turn fruit and vegetable trimmings into worm castings. The goal of vermicomposting is to create the ideal environment for worms to thrive so they can efficiently decompose the material you feed them. All you need to get started is:

- A worm bin: a large plastic storage container can be used
- Bedding materials: dampened shredded paper is perfect
- Composting worms: these need to be a special type of worm—red wigglers—in order for your bin to be successful.



For detailed information about worm composting, see DavisRecycling.org or contact the Public Works Utilities and Operations Department (see the back page of this flier for contact information).

In-Ground Composting

A very simple way to compost food scraps is to bury them at least eight inches deep in your garden. Garden soil provides a natural barrier to keep out flies and other pests, while holding in moisture and odors. However, if you have dogs that may dig in your garden, this composting method may not work.

Food scraps can be buried in empty areas of vegetable and flower gardens or in holes outside the drip line (below the ends of branches) of trees and shrubs. Use a shovel to dig a hole or trench about one foot deep. Add two to three inches of food scraps, chop and mix the scraps into soil, then cover it up with at least eight inches of soil to keep pests out.

Food scraps may take one to six months to decompose depending on the soil type, season, moisture and the type of food scraps that are buried. Seeds and small seedlings may be planted on top of buried food scraps immediately. Large transplants should not be planted until the food has decomposed. Do not bury more food scraps in the same place until the first scraps have been fully composted.



Homemade Food Digester

You can make your own food digester to compost food scraps using a galvanized metal garbage can with a tight-fitting lid (a 32-gallon can works well). Drill or punch about 20 drain holes (about 1/4 - 3/8 inch diameter), in the bottom of the can. Drill 20 more holes along the lower third of the sides.

Dig a hole in your yard deep enough to bury 1/3 to 1/2 of the can, ensuring that all of the holes drilled in the sides will be below the ground. Place the can in the hole and push the soil back in around the sides. Your new food digester is ready to use!

Composting With A Food Digester

Food scraps can be added to the digester at any time and as often as you like. Be sure the digester lid is on tight after adding the food scraps to keep raccoons and other pests out

Harvesting the Compost From The Food Digester

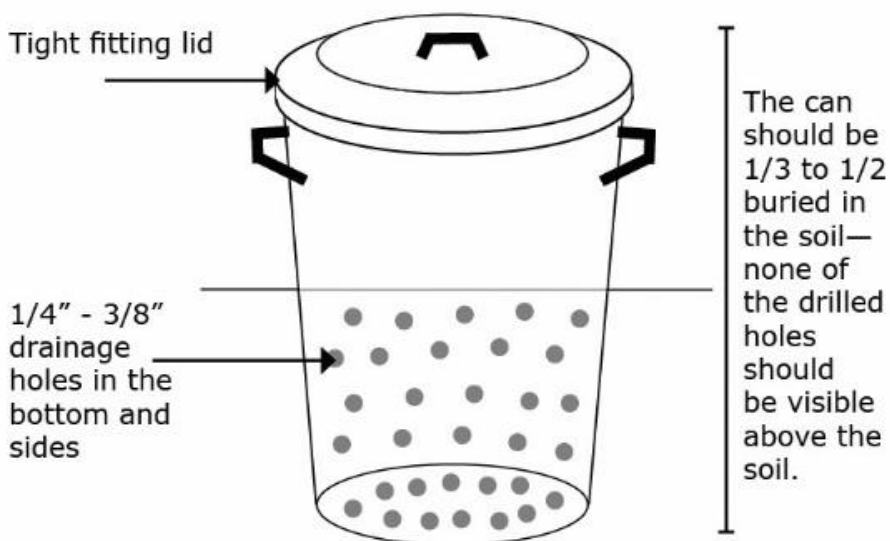
Depending on the size of the digester as well as the type and amount of food scraps added, the digester may fill in 4-12 months. Once the digester is full, the compost can be harvested in one of two ways:

- Shovel out the contents of the digester. Place any un-composted material back in the digester for further composting. Mix the composted material with some soil, lay it in the sun and wait for it to dry before applying it to the garden.
- Shovel out the contents of the digester (fully composted, partially composted and fresh food scraps) and place the contents in a trench in the garden, following the instructions for in-ground composting listed on the other side of this flier.

Managing Pests in The Food Digester

If there are cockroaches in your area, a food digester can serve as a breeding ground for them unless managed very carefully. Be sure to harvest your food digester as soon as you notice cockroaches inside or around the digester. After emptying the digester, leave the lid open for a few days to discourage the cockroaches before starting a new batch of compost in your digester.

The inside of the digester may have a slightly unpleasant smell and some fruit flies. This is normal and expected. The outside of the digester should never smell or have flies. Manage fruit flies inside the digester by hanging strips of fly paper on the inside of the digester lid. Keep odors and fruit flies at a minimum by making sure the digester lid always fits tightly. When adding more food scraps, you can also cover fresh food scraps with coarse sawdust or shredded newspaper.



TIP: Drilling holes in a metal can will leave sharp metal edges around the outside of the hole. When drilling the holes in your digester, drill from the inside of the bin to the outside. Then you won't have sharp, jagged metal around the drainage holes inside the food digester—the sharp edges will be pointed outwards into the soil.



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