



Joe Van Rossum

Home composting is an easy and inexpensive way to create a valuable soil amendment from yard and household waste. Composting means less waste going into the landfill and less need for chemical fertilizers.

While many people simply pile their compost in a heap, others may want to use a bin to contain their compost and speed up the composting process. Compost bins vary in size, use, and cost, whether you purchase a commercial product or build one yourself. This publication, from a series of do-it-yourself plans, provides you with all you need to know to build your very own compost bin.

For more information look under Resources at the end of this publication.

CAN COMPOSTER

The **can composter** (figure 1) is a great way to make small batches of compost when you don't have space for a larger bin.

Cost: Less than \$30

Capacity: About one 30-gallon bag of yard materials and kitchen scraps

Degree of difficulty: ★ Little or no building skills needed

How to construct

MATERIALS

- 30- to 50-gallon trashcan with cover (metal or plastic will work, but plastic will last longer)
- Food waste or green garden materials (see table 1)
- Shredded paper, leaves, or other dried plant material (see table 1)
- Coarse, untreated sawdust, straw, or wood chips
- Bricks or cement blocks (optional)
- Power drill
- Pitchfork, shovel, or compost turner
- Work gloves

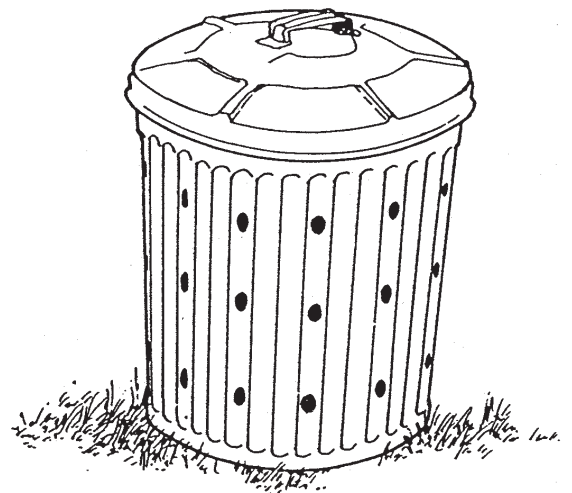
CONSTRUCTION DETAILS

1 Drill three rows of holes $\frac{1}{2}$ to 1" in size 4 to 6" apart around the sides of the can. Then drill several holes in the lid and the bottom of the trashcan. These holes will allow the air to move and excess moisture to drain.

2 (Optional.) Place the can on cement blocks or bricks to increase air circulation.

3 Place 2 to 3" of sawdust, straw, or wood chips in the bottom of the can to absorb excess moisture and improve drainage. Layer one part green (nitrogen) materials with two parts brown (carbon) materials to fill the can. Make sure your brown materials include leaves or paper, as the carbon in wood chips or sawdust is not readily available to compost microbes. End with a top layer of brown materials to control odors and pests.

FIGURE 1. Can composter



Solid and Hazardous Waste Education Center

Building skills needed:

★ Little or none ★★ Some ★★★ Above-average

DO-IT-YOURSELF COMPOST BINS

4 The finished compost will be ready in 6 to 12 months (sooner if the materials are mixed regularly and kept damp).



Now you are ready to set your bin out in your yard and begin composting! Simply mix one part green (nitrogen) materials with two parts brown (carbon) materials (table 1), keep the materials as damp as a wrung-out sponge, and use a small shovel, pitchfork, or garden fork to mix the contents from time to time.

TABLE 1. Materials for composting

Brown materials (2 parts)	Green materials (1 part)
• Dry leaves • Twigs less than ¼" in diameter • Shredded newspaper • Shredded household cardboard: egg cartons, paper towel, and toilet paper rolls	• Green leaves • Grass clippings • Weeds (before they have gone to seed) • Leftover plants at the end of the season • Coffee grounds • Fruit and vegetable scraps • Eggshells
Do not compost: Meat, bones, grease, whole eggs, dairy products, diseased or highly invasive plants, pet waste.	

Resources

For more information on composting, including the Wisconsin Master Composter Program, contact:

Solid & Hazardous Waste Education Center (SHWEC)

www.uwex.edu/ces/shwec

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Composting to Reduce the Waste Stream (NRAES-43)

Plants and Life Sciences Publishing

(PALS), Cornell Cooperative Extension

[http://palspublishing.cals.cornell.edu/](http://palspublishing.cals.cornell.edu/nra_order.taf?_function=detail&pr_booknum=nraes-43)

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[booknum=nraes-43](http://palspublishing.cals.cornell.edu/nra_order.taf?_function=detail&pr_booknum=nraes-43)

Master Composter Resource Manual

Cornell Waste Management Institute

[cwmi.css.cornell.edu/](http://cwmi.css.cornell.edu/mastercompostermanual.pdf)

[mastercompostermanual.pdf](http://cwmi.css.cornell.edu/mastercompostermanual.pdf)

These publications are available from the Learning Store (learningstore.uwex.edu):

Compost (A4021)

Do-It-Yourself Compost Bins series

- Barrel Composter (G4020-01)
- Can Composter (G4020-02)
- Concrete Block Composter (G4020-03)
- Wire Mesh Composter (G4020-04)
- Wood and Wire Composter (G4020-05)
- Wood Pallet Composter (G4020-06)
- Wood 3-Bin Composter (G4020-07)



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Do-It-Yourself Compost Bins: Can Composter (G4020-02)

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