

In-Garden Composting

What to Compost

- Fruit and vegetable scraps
- Egg shells (bake in a 200 degree oven for about 20-30 minutes to dry out and then crush into small pieces so they break down faster in the garden)
- Used coffee grounds (and filters if you'd like)
- Tea bags (removing any small staples or other non-compostable parts)
- Nut shells with any salt washed off (except walnut shells – these contain the chemical juglone which is toxic to some plants, especially tomatoes)
- Used paper towels or paper napkins (if they're not covered in oils/fats from your food)
- Cardboard tube from paper towels/toilet paper or paper grocery bags torn into small pieces

How to Compost

1. Collect kitchen scraps* (no meat, fish, dairy, or fats/oils) until you are ready to bury them. I use an empty plastic container with a lid so that I can collect scraps throughout the day without any odors. I have even collected scraps over the course of a couple days when the weather was not favorable to bury the scraps or when I didn't have an amount of scraps that I felt was large enough to bury and found no odors, but be careful of moisture levels in a closed container so that mold does not grow.
2. Find a place in your garden to bury your scraps. If you are doing this in a garden bed that hasn't been planted yet, you can simply pick any spot to start. You can start at one end of the garden and work your way to the other digging holes every day or two, or start where you plan to plant first so that the organic matter has some time to break down before you plant there (wait about 2-4 weeks) and then work your way to where you'll be planting later. Once you've planted in a garden, feel free to continue to compost with this method, just place your hole outside of the root-zone of any of your growing plants so you don't damage the roots with your shovel (think at least 8-12 inches, or more depending on the size of your plant, away from the crown of the plant to be safe). You can do this in vegetable beds or even in your ornamental garden beds.
3. Dig a hole at least 12-inches deep and as wide as you think is necessary to throw in your scraps, keeping them about 4-inches thick. If you have a lot of scraps, you can dig a trench to cover one large area or dig multiple smaller holes to spread it all out.
4. Cover the organic matter with about 6-8 inches of soil, and water the area. Keep the soil moist to aid in the composting process and speed up the breakdown of the organic matter.

A Few Tips

- As soon as the soil is workable in the spring, start adding in-place compost holes to your vegetable garden so that the organic matter has time to break down before you plant most of your crops.
- Continue to add compost to the garden through fall until the soil is no longer workable so that the organic matter will have all winter to break down and will be ready by spring.
- Chop your kitchen scraps up into small pieces or throw them in a blender so that they will decompose faster.
- If you have a site where you plan to plant a tree or shrub the following spring, start an in-place compost hole during the summer or fall prior to planting so that the site will have nice fertile soil to plant in when you're ready.

For additional information about other methods of composting visit University of Illinois Extension *Composting in the Home Garden*: <https://web.extension.illinois.edu/compost/>