



# MORE FOOD, LESS WASTE

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## A Guide to Composting at Home and Reducing Food Waste

Occupant Engagement  
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# THE FOOD WASTE PROBLEM

Food waste is a growing problem.

58% of food produced in Canada goes to waste each year. Organics that are disposed of in landfill generate methane gas, which is 25 times more damaging to our environment than carbon dioxide.

Recovering food waste through residential composting or giving new life to food scraps can be an easy way to tackle climate change from home. This guide will provide simple solutions that make a difference in reducing food waste.

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## CONTENT

- **Compost at Home.** Everything you need to know about composting at home, whether that is in your backyard or condo.
- **Reduce Food Waste.** From planning ahead to repurposing veggies for better meals, you will learn easy ways to minimize food waste at home.
- **Additional Resources.** If this guide peaks your interest, learn more about how to reduce your environmental impact through food.





# COMPOST AT HOME

Compost is a mixture of decomposed plant and food waste that can be used as a natural fertilizer to fuel plant growth and restore depleted soil.

Easy and free to do at home, composting is said to divert 30% of household waste from landfill. Landfills lack oxygen which is required for composting, meaning that organic matter that is sent to landfill does not decompose quickly enough and instead, generates harmful methane gas.

Creating your own compost can reduce the need for chemical fertilizers for your lawn and gardens – helping to save you money and keep our local waterways healthy. Below are a few basic guidelines for making your own compost.

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- **A Balanced Ratio.** Decomposition requires carbon (browns) and nitrogen (greens) in a 3:1 ratio, preferably in small pieces as this speeds up the decomposition process.  
Browns: this includes materials, such as dead leaves, twigs, branches, sawdust, and newspaper.  
Greens: this includes grass clippings, vegetable and fruit scraps, and coffee grounds.  
Avoid throwing these products into your compost.
  - **Optimal Temperature.** Ideal decomposition happens at 44° to 52° Celsius. As the temperature drops, decomposition slows down and stops under freezing temperatures. Active piles of compost can be ready for use in a few weeks or months, while colder piles may take up to a year. If piles freeze, decomposition can start again following thaw and warmer weather.
  - **The Right Moisture.** Your compost should be moist, but not wet, as the presence of excess water reduces oxygen and slows decomposition.





# COMPOST AT HOME



## Composting in your backyard can be a rewarding experience, allowing you to recycle yard and food waste.

- Select a bin and a site to place it on. At the bottom of the bin, arrange a six inch layer of brown material. This layer helps to bring airflow to your compost pile.
- After the base is formed, you can begin using your compost pile as intended, alternating between layers of green and brown material. The pile will shrink as it decomposes.
- Monitor your pile and watch for signs of unpleasant odours or the pile not shrinking, both of which indicate that there may be some troubleshooting required. Water your pile as needed, keeping it moist but not wet.
- Once your bin reaches full capacity or 2-3 months have passed, check the bottom of the bin to see if your compost is ready for harvest.

## Setting up a composting station indoors or on a balcony can be a good solution for smaller spaces.

- Select an indoor compost bin and where you would like to place it. Start by adding a moist layer of brown matter and a cup of sprinkled soil on top. Instead of yard waste as brown matter, you can try shredded newspaper, cardboard, and dead leaves. Create a stash of shredded newspaper to have on hand.
- Add food scraps as needed. Throw a handful or two of shredded newspaper every time you add food scraps, as this helps to reduce excess moisture.
- Once a week, turn your bins contents with a shovel or by rolling it on its side. Depending on your home's ambient temperature, check your compost in 2-3 weeks to see if it is ready for harvest.

**Composting ensures that the Earth’s nutrients are returned back to the soil, helping to grow more fresh produce. Below, find a few tips for harvesting and using your compost.**

- **Touch Test.** Mature compost should be crumbly, without anything recognizable—like intact vegetable peels or leaves. Don’t worry if you find intact pits or corncobs as those are larger and will take longer to break down. Simply return anything intact back into your pile for further decomposition.
- **Smell Test.** Your compost should smell loamy, like a forest just after the rain. If there are wafts of ammonia or sour odours, this indicates that your pile may need more time until it’s ready for harvest.
- **Sight Test.** Your compost should look dark and rich, akin to its nickname of “black gold.”
- **Add as Mulch.** Once you have a mature compost you’re happy with, try incorporating it into your garden. Compost added to soil surfaces as a 3-6 inch layer will improve water retention and prevent weeds from taking over.
- **Make a Potting Mix.** A simple potting mix of equal parts compost, vermiculite, and soil can make a nutrient-dense medium for growing houseplants.
- **Sprinkle Garden Beds.** Two or three times during the growing season, try sprinkling compost on your garden beds for a natural fertilizer. As rainfall occurs, the compost’s nutrients will percolate down to root level.

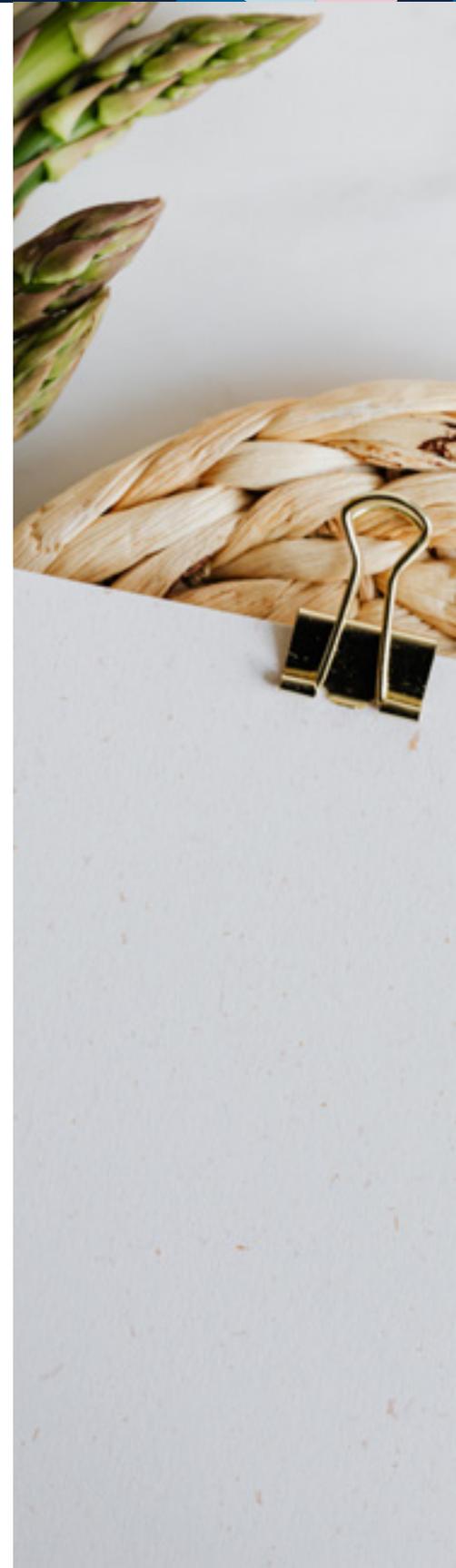




# REDUCE FOOD WASTE

**Reducing food waste can happen before you even step foot in a grocery store. Taking a few minutes each week to plan what to do with your groceries can be an effective strategy for creating more nutritious, low-waste meals.**

- **Plan Your Meals.** Designate one day a week as your meal planning day and list out your preferred meals along with what ingredients are required. Try to select meals with similar ingredients to maximize the value of your groceries and avoid wasting leftover ingredients that you rarely use.
- **Inventory Your Kitchen.** Before making a trip to the grocery store, take an inventory of what is in your fridge, freezer, and pantry. See what needs to be used up and challenge yourself to build a meal with those ingredients. Understand the difference between “best before” and “expiry” dates, and check to make sure food is actually bad before tossing it out.
- **Prep and Store.** After coming home from the grocery store, set aside some time to wash, dry, and chop your fruits and vegetables, placing your fresh food in clear containers for healthy snacks and easy cooking. Remember to store your produce in the proper place to avoid early spoilage.
- **Eat Fresh, First.** To preserve freshness and optimal nutritional value, use perishable foods like meat and seafood earlier in the week. Save staples like dried pasta, beans, and eggs for later in the week.
- **Portion and Freeze.** Set aside individual portions for easy access and freeze food to make them last longer. For fruits and vegetables that are about to spoil, you can chop and freeze them to make smoothie kits. Bread can last in the freezer for up to three months, chicken can last for up to nine months, and fruits and vegetables can last for eight months to a year. As you plan your weekly meals, defrost what you require as needed.





# REDUCE FOOD WASTE



There are many creative tips for lengthening the life of your fresh vegetables, so that you can cook with a more diverse set of ingredients with less waste.

- **Soak in Ice Water.** To revive wilted vegetables like lettuce, broccoli, and celery, soak them in a bowl of ice water for 5-10 minutes.
- **Turn to Soup.** For vegetables that are past their prime and not quite crunchy enough, try to use them up in a soup or casserole.
- **Preserve by Pickling.** The combination of water, vinegar, and salt is a fast and effective way to enjoy fresh vegetables with a twist. Virtually any vegetable can be pickled, with the brine customizable to your individual taste. To get started, you can try an easy [red pickled onion](#), or a classic [spicy cucumber pickle](#).
- **Try a Regrow DIY.** The usefulness of your produce can extend beyond the point of using them up. Many common vegetables can be [regrown](#) with just water and sunshine. Scallions and leeks can be regrown endlessly—allowing for years of at-home harvests. Regrowing carrot and turnip ends can allow you to enjoy creative pestos made from their stems.
- **Craft a Compound Butter.** For fresh herbs year-round, try making a [compound butter](#). Rinse, dry, and chop fresh herbs—filling an ice tray with individual herbs or a custom blend tailored to your tastes. Fill the tray with melted butter or olive oil straight from the bottle. Once the tray has frozen over, the cubes can be stored in a freezer bag, to add a flavourful touch to your next dish.
- **Stew a Stock from Scraps.** Practice the values of the circular economy and designate a freezer bag to save your vegetable scraps, like onion and carrot peels. When the bag becomes full, add its contents to a pot of boiling water, simmer for 10 minutes, and strain. The [resulting stock](#) can act as a base for soups, or be frozen for later use.



# EXTRAS

**Food waste is an issue that impacts the environment and food insecurity in our community. We encourage you to shop smart and learn how to reduce your environmental impact through food. The following resources provide further information on the problem of food waste:**

- [Differentiate Between “Best Before” and “Expiry Dates”](#)
- [FAO Tips for Becoming a Food Hero](#)
- [Love Food Hate Waste: Food Storage from A-Z](#)
- [Second Harvest: The Avoidable Crisis of Food Waste](#)
- [Natural Resources Defense Council: Composting 101](#)

