

The FoodPrint. One Month Composting Guide:

Build a sustainable composting habit in just four weeks

Americans throw away roughly 40% of the food we buy, much of it perfectly edible, and there are big consequences, both for our wallets and for the climate. But with a few simple changes we can drastically cut down on what we throw out. There are two big ways to reduce waste in your home: The first is in your kitchen, by repurposing scraps and making shopping plans that help you waste less by using food while it's at its peak. The second is composting, or taking food scraps and letting them decompose into nutrient-rich soil.

Composting is a great way to live low waste, help fight climate change and feed your garden — and it doesn't have to be intimidating. Whether you're using a compost pickup service or building a compost bin in your yard, this interactive, clickable guide will give you everything you need to compost with confidence in just four weeks.



What is Compost?

Compost is simply organic matter (kitchen scraps, like tomato stems or corn cobs) that is broken down by microbes, or by other organisms like earthworms. That organic matter can also include yard waste and even some paper and cardboard.

The great news is that you don't need a backyard compost pile to reap its benefits: More and more cities have municipally-run or private compost pickup services. You might also be able to donate your scraps to a community garden or nearby farmers' market.

With this guide, you can set up a plan for any option, so you can start composting no matter your circumstances.

Week One: Do Your Research

Understand Local Resources and Laws

Home composting: Most municipalities allow home composting, but may have specific regulations about compost bins (like keeping them away from the sidewalk). Your public library or local extension office can point you to the resources you need to learn about local laws.

Compost pickup: If you don't have space or time to compost at home, do a quick search online for 'compost pickup' and the name of your town to see what's out there. No compost pickup service near you? You may still be able to collect and donate scraps to a local community garden, school garden, or other community organization, or to a [community compost pickup program](#).

Other resources:

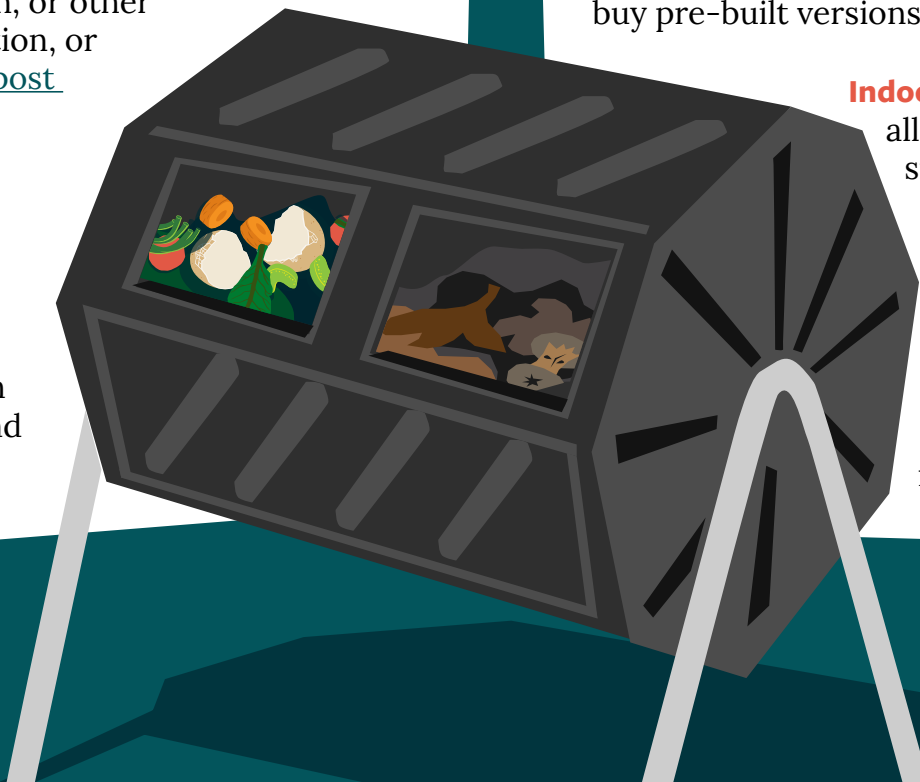
Your local county or university extension office, plant nursery, conservation group, or community garden can offer guidance and maybe even classes.

Learn About Types of Compost Bins

Indoor bin (a sealed bucket or other container to collect scraps): helps keep insects and odors at bay until you bring your scraps outside to your compost pile or outdoor pickup bin.

Outdoor bin: for making compost in your backyard, and comes in many varieties, like a static bin you'll turn with a pitchfork, or a tumbler with a crank. There are lots of resources online to build your own, or you can buy pre-built versions.

Indoor composter: small bins that allow you to create compost in a small indoor space. These include [worm compost](#) and [bokashi bins](#). Note that while there are some new fancy electric countertop compost machines on the market right now, many of these will only break down or dehydrate your scraps, but will not turn them into usable compost.



Pick the Best Compost System For You

It's time to think about what compost system is the best fit for you.

- What setup will work (or not work!) with the space you have?
- What resources, like pickup services, exist in your community?
- What is your budget for buying bins or other equipment?

Compost pickup services can help you save time, but composting at home can save money, since you aren't paying monthly fees. You might also save money by dropping scraps off at a community garden that accepts donations. Consider capacity, too: You want a bin large enough to hold the scraps your family produces.

- What does a sustainable composting habit look like for you?
- What can fit into your life without overwhelming you?
- How much time do you want to spend doing these tasks?
- Does the pickup process work with your schedule and lifestyle?
- Do you have something to help you carry your scraps to the market? Can you walk there?

Choosing a composting system that is low-effort now will help you stick with your compost plan later!

Learn What Does and Doesn't Go in Compost

Not all composting systems are the same, and as a result, not all systems will accept the same inputs.

Pick up services or community dropoff sites will let you know what they take and don't; Many don't want bones or meat scraps, and want you to remove stickers off produce, for example.

For a home compost pile, there is some learning you'll have to do, but composting is easy to do with just a little know-how. You can learn more about which items from your kitchen will be beneficial to your backyard compost, and best practices to avoid pests and smells, in our [Composting 101](#) guide.

Week Two: Make a Plan

Choose Your Compost Bin

Compost pickup: check if your pickup service provides an outdoor bin for collection. If they don't, make sure you choose a bin that's within their guidelines.

Indoor bin: Think about where your bin will go: Indoor bins might fit under the sink or tucked in a broom closet, and some are attractive enough to sit out in plain sight.

No bin: For people with limited space or where bugs are a big problem, another option is to freeze your scraps until they're ready to go outside.

Outdoor bin: Decide where it will go (on a patio? In a garden?) and take any measurements you need before choosing a bin, or buying supplies to build one.



Set Up Your Compost Service

For pickup service: use this week to set up your account. Make sure to go over what compostables they will accept, how often they pick up your scraps, etc.

For local dropoff: Now is the time to find out if the local community gardens or farmers' markets you identified accept donations for their compost bins. Check what compostables they accept, and their schedule for drop-offs.

Make a Compost Plan

A simple compost plan, which just says who takes care of what, and when, can help your compost dreams transition from goal to habit.

Indoor compost bin:

Whether you're using pickup or dropoff, or composting at home, think through the nuts and bolts of your daily routine. Where will you store your indoor bin, and who is in charge of filling it up and taking it out? How often will you empty it?

For compost pickup or donation:

Decide how your compost pickup will work into your week. Who's in charge of collecting scraps after meals, or bringing them down to the curbside bin? And who's in charge of either dropping off scraps for donation, or making sure the bin is out on the curb for pickup?

For home composting:

How often do you need to maintain your compost? If you have a tumbler, you might just give it a spin once a week after you drop your scraps in. If you have a freestanding bin, you'll have to occasionally turn it with a pitchfork or shovel. Make a plan for when you'll do this: It might even be helpful to mark your compost turning days on your calendar so you don't forget.



Week Three: Buy or Build What You Need

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You're almost ready to start composting! This week, you'll get everything in place, and double-check that you have all the tools and knowledge you need to make your new compost habit a success.

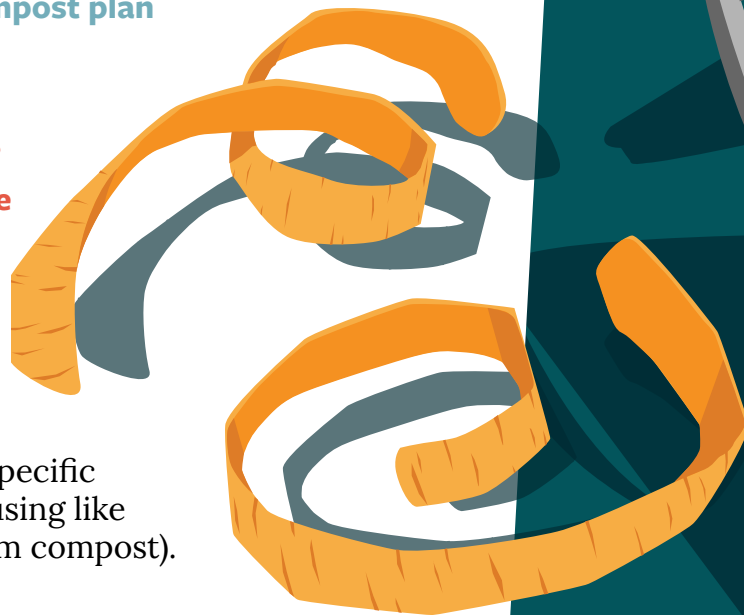
Set up your compost system

- ✓ **Bought a bin?**
- ✓ **Found a place for it?**
- ✓ **Scheduled pickup (if using)?**
- ✓ **Bought and assembled an outdoor bin (if using)?**

Double check your compost plan

- ✓ **Have your tools?**
- ✓ **Have a plan?**
- ✓ **Know what goes in?**
- ✓ **Know how you'll use your compost once it's ready?**

Use FoodPrint's [Compost 101](#) and [How to Compost](#), or our resources for any specific systems you might be using like [Vermicomposting](#) (worm compost).



Week Four: Start Composting

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Get Busy: You've planned and prepped, and now it's time to put your plans in action! Each day this week, gather your scraps and put them in your indoor or outdoor bin using the plan you built during week two.

Reflect and Adjust: At the end of the week, take a moment to reflect on how it went. What worked? What didn't? What could be better? Make any necessary adjustments so that your new composting habit is low-effort and even fun.

Celebrate Yourself: You are part of the fight against food waste! Thanks for being part of the solution.

