What Can Be Put in a Home Yard Waste Compost?

Do Compost in piles or bins.

- Fresh grass clippings
- Fresh garden trimmings, flowers and plant leaves
- Barnyard manure (horse, cow, chickens, rabbits)
- Garden vegetable leaves and stalks
- Wood leaves and flowers
- House plants and potting mix
- Autumn leaves
- Tangles and stalks
- Sawdust or shavings
- Shredded paper, cardboard, glossy coated paper
- Toilet paper towels

Do Not Compost in piles or bins.

- Fresh garden clippings treated with herbicide
- Insect infested or diseased plants
- Insect infested or diseased plants
- Insect infested or diseased plants
- Fresh garden clippings treated with herbicide
- Berry brambles and other thorny stems
- Sawdust from plywood, treated or painted wood
- Glossy coated paper
- Blue recycling cart

BATTLE OF THE BINS: BACKYARD COMPOSTING VS. "CLEAN GREEN COLLECTION"

Why make and use your own compost when you can use Bellevue's convenient yard and food waste collection program and buy the finished Cedar Grove Compost at local stores? The information below will help you compare the benefits of both.

Home Composting

- Easy compost!
- No energy used to transport and process.
- Compost is much better for local streams and lakes.
- Compost is free.
- No need to store or order.

Curbside Collection / Purchase Compost

- Free bin, no work required!
- Best for composting branches over 1” in diameter and elongated leaves.
- Hot composting destroys weed seeds and roots.
- Uniform, fine compost easy to spread and looks as good as mulch.
- As much compost as you need, ready when you need it.

BELLEVUE: GOING GREEN

Making and using compost from yard trimmings is easy steps you can take to grow a healthier garden with less water, work, and waste. Making and using compost also helps keep local streams and lakes clean by filtering storm runoff, preventing erosion and reducing the use of fertilizer and pesticides. This guide describes simple ways to compost your yard trimmings. Other ways to recycle organic wastes at home are described in the Composting Food Scraps, Mulch, and Lawns guides.

Choose a Composting Method That Works for You

There are lots of ways to make good compost.

The two basic “recipes” that follow can be used to make compost in piles or bins. Use the method that matches the time and effort you want to spend.

A no-fuss recipe that works by adding fresh trimmings in small amounts to pile as they are picked up around the yard. Materials at the bottom of pile will be composted in 6-12 months.

Steps:

1. Pull yard trimmings in bin or pile as they are picked up from yard. Keep plastic yard waste bags and modern dry cleaning bags moist as needed.
2. Cover with plastic, soil, or tin lid to keep moist.
3. Dip into pile occasionally. If materials that have been in the pile for a few months are not decomposing, check the "Compost Troubleshooting" chart that follows and make needed adjustments.
4. In 6-12 months, pull aside freshest trimmings on top to harvest the finished compost below. Return uncomposted materials to pile, moistening if needed.
**QUICK AND HOT COMPOST**

- **Ingredients:** Several large wheelbarrows, yard trimmings, several large wheelbarrows or trash cans of “brown” (composting materials), water (hose with spray head).

- **Steps:**
  1. Cut or shred woody stalks with a pruner, the middle of new pile. Moisten dry materials with a fork until all glisten with moisture.
  2. Leaf mulch and grass cycling lawsns. See the guide for details. When you must collect grass clippings, spread them in a thin (1/2 inch) mulch on garden beds, or mix them with straw or leaves saved from autumn to compost. Help these decomposers with an optimal diet can reduce composting time to just a few months.
  3. Mulching and Grasscycling (left) are also great ways to move yard trimmings. See the Mulch and Lawn guides for details.
  4. Ample Moisture. Materials should be moist but not soggy. Chips or straw, woodier materials may be composted and are a good source of “greens.”
  5. A Mix of “Greens” and “Browns." Decomposers thrive on an equal mix of succulent “greens” like fresh grass clippings, small leaves, and flowers, and woody material “browns” such as autumn leaves and stalks. Too many “browns” make a smelly mess. A pile that is too “brown” decomposes very slowly. Use the list of greens and browns that follows to create a healthy balance.
  6. Smells like rotten eggs or garbage. Smells like wet soil or finished compost on top of a pile can help keep it moist, but is not necessary.

- **Steps:**
  1. Pile is dry. Side: Leaf mulch and grass cycling (left) are also great ways to move yard trimmings. See the Mulch and Lawn guides for details.
  2. Pile is damp. Head: Check in pile for finished compost (see uncompromising material in new batch.)

- **Symptoms:**
  - Smelly garbage, like soil.
  - Let age 4-8 weeks until dark and coarse stalks allows air into the pile. Turn soggy, thin and woodier materials may be composted and are a good source of “greens.”

- **Solution:**
  - Turn pile and add dry stalks, leaves, or straw.
  - No smell. Add greens and browns.
  - Lack of greens. Add greens or compost fertilizer. Chop or mince coarse woody materials.

- **Steps:**
  1. Cutting or shredding with a pruner, the middle of new pile. Moisten dry materials with a fork until all glisten with moisture.
  2. Mulching and Grasscycling (left) are also great ways to move yard trimmings. See the Mulch and Lawn guides for details.
Yard Waste Compost Troubleshooting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symptoms</th>
<th>Cause</th>
<th>Solution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Smells like rotten eggs or garbage.</td>
<td>Pile too wet.</td>
<td>Turn pile and add dry stalks, leaves, or straw.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pile is dry inside.</td>
<td>Too much woody material.</td>
<td>Mix in greens or fertilizer. Chop or remove coarse woody materials.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pile is damp inside, but not composting.</td>
<td>Lack of greens.</td>
<td>Mix in greens or compost material.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pile has shrunken, but looks undecomposed.</td>
<td>Outside of pile is dry.</td>
<td>Check in pile for finished compost. Mix uncomposted material in new batch.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chunks of slimy grass, generally moist.</td>
<td>Too much fresh grass.</td>
<td>Leave clippings on lawn, or mix in brown leaves or straw.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Bellevue: Going Green

Recipe for Quick Compost

**Ingredients:** Enough materials to make a 3' x 3' x 3' pile or to fill a bin. Several large wheelbarrows or trash cans of fresh “green” yard trimmings. Several large wheelbarrows or trash cans of “brown” yard trimmings. Water (hose with spray head).

**Steps:**
1. Cut or shred woody stalks with a pruner, machete, shovel, lawn mower, or shredder/chipper.
2. Put roughly equal parts “green” and “brown” on a tarp.
3. Spray materials with water and mix with garden fork until all materials are mixed.
4. Load mix into bin or stack in pile. Repeat until bin is full or all materials are mixed.
5. Monitor the heat in middle of the pile using a compost thermometer or by touch. Turn pile when it has heated and starts to cool (5-7 days), and if materials are too wet or compacted, or if materials are too dry or have odor.
6. Cover with plastic or carpet scrap and let age 4-8 weeks until dark and compost.

**Symptoms:**
- Smells like rotten eggs or garbage.
- Pile is dry inside.
- Pile is damp inside, but not slimy.
- Chunks of slimy grass, grass clippings, and vegetable scraps using systems that contain odors and deter pests. Meat and other animal scraps should not be composted at home. Put these items in curbside gray garbage cart.

**A Mix of “Greens” and “Browns.”** Decomposers thrive on an equal ratio of “sloppy green” for the fast grass clippings, send leaves, and flowers, and woody “browns” such as leafy branches and stalks. Too many “greens” make a smelly mess. A pile that is too “brown” decomposes very slowly. Use the list of greens and browns that follow to create a healthy balance.

**A Diet for Quicker Compost**

- **Greens**
- **Browns**

Naturally occurring bugs, microorganisms, and fungi will decompose yard trimmings left in the garden or placed in a compost pile but it may take a year or more. Help your decomposers with an optimal diet to reduce composting time to just a few months.

**What to Do About . . . ?**

Do I need to add compost “starters,” fertilizers, or amendments? Adding hot yard trimmings is usually enough. Although high nitrogen fertilizers such as blood meal or urea help if a pile has too many “browns.”

Should I add soil or finished compost? A layer of soil or finished compost on top of a pile can help keep it moist, but is not necessary.

Why can’t I compost food scraps with yard trimmings? Food scraps—especially meat, fish, and dairy products—contain bad smells and attract rats, flies, dogs, raccoons, and other pests. The City of Bellevue’s Compost Troubleshooting chart explains safe ways to compost grains, fruits, and vegetable scraps using systems that contain odors and deter pests. Meat and other animal scraps should not be composted at home. Put these items in curbside green yard debris cart.

What can I do if I mostly have grass clippings to compost? The best option is to leave grass clippings on the lawn. See the Lawn guide for details. When you must collect grass clippings, spread them on a little 1/2 to 1 inch of mulch on garden beds, or mix them with straw or brown leaves saved from autumn to compost.

Can I compost pet wastes? No! Dog, cat, and other pet feces can transmit illnesses to people. Bag it and put into curbside gray garbage cart. Chicken, horse, and rabbit manures may be composted and are a good source of “green.”

**Turning Systems** (below) are designed for quick composting of large volumes. They can be a series of bins or rotating barrels mounted on frames. A variety of barrel systems are offered by mail order suppliers.
What Can Be Put in a Home Yard Waste Compost?

**Do Compost in piles or bins.**

- Fresh grass clippings
- Fresh garden trimmings, flowers and plant leaves
- Barberry plume (rose, cow, chicken, rabbit)
- Garden vegetative leaves and stalks
- Wood leaves and flowers
- Household potting media
- Yard trimmings
- Mulch
- Sawdust or shavings
- Dried grass head or watering can head
- Standardized paper, cardboard, paper towels
- Home cooked paper. Put in curbside blue recycling cart.

**Do Not Compost in piles or bins.**

- Pet wastes
- Insect infested or diseased plants.
- Weeds like ivy, morning glory and quack grass. Put in curbside green yard debris cart.
- Insect infested or diseased plants.
- Clippings recently treated with herbicide.
- Weed seed heads. Roots of spreading weeds like dandelions and brambles and other thorny stems. Put in curbside green yard debris cart.
- Berry branches over 1/2” diameter. Berry stems. Put in curbside green yard debris cart.
- Insect infested or diseased plants.
- House plants and potting mix
- Fresh garden trimmings, flowers and plant leaves
- First time, no work required! Best for composting branches over 1” diameter and large leaves.
- Mulch compost is easy to spread and looks good on the lawn. Great material for pathways.
- Fresh compost is easy to spread and looks good on the lawn. Great material for pathways.
- Curing compost. Returns yard waste to soil. Put in curbside green yard debris cart.
- Brown recycling cart.

**BATTLE OF THE BINS: BACKYARD COMPOSTING VS. “CLEAN GREEN COLLECTION”**

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**Home Composting**

- Free compost!
- No energy used to transport and process.
- Custom compost products may preserve nutrients and beneficial soil life.
- Cooler compost process may preserve nutrients and beneficial soil life.

**Curbside Collection / Purchase Compost**

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- Best for composting branches over 1” diameter and large leaves.
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**RESOURCES**

Bellevue’s Natural Lawn and Garden website
www.bellevuewa.gov/naturallandscape.htm

Bellevue’s Natural Gardening Guides
Composting Food Scraps / Backyard Composting
- Site, Soil, Sun, and Seasonal Calendar
- Design / Lawns: Alternatives
- Mulch, Barbery
- Mulch, Birds, and Diseases
- Plant Recommendations / Seasonal Calendar
- Soil, Watering For copses, and Bellevue’s Natural Lawn and Garden website (below) or call Bellevue Utilities at 425-452-8332.

King County Solid Waste Division’s composting website
http://www.kingcountygov.com/waste/Composting

Grow Smart, Grow Safe
City of Bellevue Utilities

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A no-fuss recipe that works by adding fresh trimmings in small amounts to a mix, as they are picked up around the yard. Materials at the bottom of piles will be composted in 6-12 months.

1. Put yard trimmings in bin or piles as they are picked up from yard. Put in curbside blue recycling cart.
2. Moisture from leaf and wood fragrant. Put compost on the lawn or in garden bed.
3. Water when compost is ready to harvest. The finished compost will be delivered to your curb.
4. In 6 to 12 months, put finished compost on top to harvest the finished compost below. Replace underestimated materials to be made, maintained.

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Compost at local stores? The information below will help you compare the benefits of both.

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RESOURCES
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www.bellevuewa.gov/naturalyardcare.htm

Bellevue’s Natural Gardening Guides
Composting Food Scraps, Mulch, and Lawn Fertilizer

For copies, call Bellevue’s Natural Law and Garden website (above) or call Belleville Utilities at 425-452-6932.

King County Solid Waste Division’s composting website
http://www.kingcounty.gov/solidwaste/gardenhotline

The Garden Hotline
www.gardenhotline.org or 206-633-0224
Grow Smart, Grow Safe
www.growsmartgrowSAFE.org

Natural Yard Care Neighborhoods
www.naturalyardcare.info

Alternate formats available: Voice 425-452-6800 or TTY relay: 711.

Bellevue’s Natural Lawn and Garden website
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