

Don't Waste Your Garbage!

What's in your kitchen garbage? Coffee grounds mixed with banana peels? A rotten apple, wilted lettuce and moldy oranges? It all makes for a smelly, mucky mix. But did you know that you never have to throw any non-meat food scraps in the garbage again? That's right. Compost the stuff instead.

"Yecch," you say. You may have heard that compost smells like a garbage dump. Or that it attracts mice. But that's not true. Not if you do it right. You may not realize it, but a lot of good things can come out of composting, and we're not just talking about worms.

- If you use garbage stickers, composting can reduce the cost of your weekly trash pick-up. In fact, composting can divert as much as 30% of household waste away from your garbage can.
- Less waste in your kitchen garbage means less waste going into local landfills. Following the above statistic, it's no surprise that one-third of landfill waste consists of compostable materials. Think how much garbage we would keep from our rapidly diminishing landfills if we all composted?
- Composting non-meat food scraps provides you with excellent soil for gardening, and provides a great alternative to chemical fertilizers.
- Extra Bonus: Composting is like creating a cool science project (especially with your kids). Discover all the things you can compost, from your dog's fur, to newspaper (the ink is soy-based), to dryer lint.

Okay, okay, but you're still wondering, how much trouble is composting? Well, you will probably need to buy a compost bin for your back or side yard. These range from \$80 to \$300 depending on the size and sophistication of the bin. If you are a DYI-er, you can make a bin out of wooden shipping pallets, or a plastic trash can. This website has great information about all things compost: <http://www.planetnatural.com/composting-101/how-it-works/>

Here's my bin, an "Earth Machine," which is 80 gallons and costs around \$100. This type has a closed top with a screw-on lid, which keeps potential smells in and keeps mice out.



You'll also need a small container for your kitchen, where you put food scraps before taking them outside to the larger bin. There are some nice-looking ones, either ceramic or stainless steel, that cost between \$20 and \$40. Many have a replaceable charcoal filter in the lid, which effectively reduces smells. Replace the filter when you start to smell something, every three or four months. Check out this guide to containers: <http://www.compostjunkie.com/compost-containers.html>

Here's my container, a steel one that makes me feel like I compost in the south of France.



Put your scraps in the kitchen container and once it fills up, take a trip to the backyard and dump it in the bin.



Bottom line: don't be intimidated by composting. Sure, you can strive to be a master composter and get really involved in the process – experimenting with how you layer scraps, grass, leaves, getting a good nitrogen mix, stirring the stuff with a stirring tool (I like to do this, as it speeds up the decomposition process and reduces smells) Or don't do anything. Just dump your kitchen scraps in the bin and let the stuff sit there. Nature will take its course either way.



If you are just starting out, it will take until the end of summer for the compost at the bottom of the bin to become rich soil. With my bin, the door at the bottom slides up to reveal soil, ready for use. If you don't garden and you don't need the soil, don't worry. You can periodically spread the stuff around bushes in your yard that could use some natural fertilizer. Or give the soil to someone who does garden. You'll gain newfound popularity for your "back to the earth" ways.



So, give it a try. What have you got to lose? Just a lot of garbage!

- *David Mrazek, Member, Village of La Grange Park Sustainability Commission. Questions about composting? Email David at: dmrazek@sbcglobal.net Don't forget to like our Facebook page - <https://www.facebook.com/LGPSustainability>*