

Composting Made Practical: Finding Your Best Fit

By Carina Olivetti

On average, organic materials make up one-third of an individual's waste stream! Composting at home reduces emissions from hauling food scraps away and creates nutrient-rich soil right where you live and grow. It's easier to get started than most people expect—and incredibly satisfying. After becoming a pro at [food waste prevention](#), you will still need to find the composting method that works best for you. Whether you have a small outdoor space or plenty of room to work with, there's a composting method that can fit your lifestyle.

Below is a guide to common backyard composting options, including their benefits and considerations, to help you choose the best system for your home.

Note: A consistent stockpile of carbon-rich material (e.g., leaves and wood chips) is required for all methods.

Compost Bin (Enclosed)

Enclosed compost bins work well in small to medium yards and keep compost tidy and contained. This method reduces pests and odors. If conditions are right, the enclosed bin may have faster decomposition than an open pile.

Enclosed bins are not large enough to handle a high volume of material. They can be harder to turn and mix. The bin may need occasional cleaning or maintenance.

Open Compost Pile

The open compost pile is the easiest and least expensive method. It can handle large volumes of food scraps, leaves, and yard debris. The pile is simple to turn and heats up well for faster decomposition when conditions are good.

The downside to piles is that they can appear messy, are more likely to attract pests, and odors may develop if materials aren't balanced. The compost pile method is best for large yards with adequate outdoor space.

Tumbler Compost System

A compost tumbler is a small-scale system best suited for residential use. Because of its limited volume, it typically does not reach the high temperatures needed for thermophilic composting or large-scale decomposition.

However, tumblers are an excellent way to divert food scraps from the landfill and are ideal for people who want a low-effort composting option that requires minimal time and physical work.

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Vermiculture (Worm Composting)

Vermiculture uses red wiggler worms to break down food scraps, yard trimmings, and other organic matter into a nutrient-rich material called castings.

- Usable compost is usually produced within three to four months.
- A liquid byproduct known as worm compost tea can be used as a high-quality fertilizer for houseplants or gardens.

Note: Night crawlers and common garden worms are not suitable for vermiculture systems.

3-Bin Composting System

A three-bin (or chamber) system is designed to compost small to moderate amounts of food scraps on site—ranging from the waste of a single family to that of dozens of households, depending on system size.

- Systems may include one to three bins.
- Compost can be managed using batch or continuous-feed methods.
- Bins can be built from upcycled materials or constructed as custom designs.

This method offers an organized and scalable approach to backyard composting.

No matter which composting method you choose, you're taking a meaningful step toward reducing waste and improving the health of your soil. Start with the system that best fits your space, time, and comfort level—and enjoy watching everyday scraps transform into something valuable.