



Nurture Nature Center, located in Easton, Pennsylvania, created an Urban Garden in a small parking area using recycled and found materials to demonstrate low-cost growing techniques for small urban areas. This fact sheet is part of a series that demonstrates ways in which urban gardens can bring nature into their worlds.

Kitchen Composting

Description:

Many people do not have the space for an outdoor compost bin. Yet they don't want to toss compostable items, such as food scraps, into the trashcan to be hauled away. And why should they, when these materials can be diverted from the waste stream and turned into rich compost. A typical household throws away over 400 lbs of food waste each year!

Kitchen Composting Options:

Automatic Composting Systems mix, heat, and aerate automatically. Convenience comes at a price, however. NatureMill's automatic composters start at \$250.

Countertop Compost Containers are widely available, and vary greatly in style and price. Blanco Solon makes a very stylish (and pricey) vessel that can be inset in a kitchen countertop. One important feature to look for in a countertop container is a tight lid. Whatever you use to collect your kitchen scraps, the contents will need to be transferred every couple of days into a backyard compost pile or outdoor composter. As an intermediate step you can collect kitchen scraps in a 5-gallon bucket placed just outside the kitchen door, and empty it into your compost bin every few weeks. Keep odors down by having a supply of finished compost or potting mix near the kitchen waste bucket, and, each time you add food scraps, covering them with a scoop of the compost or potting mix. Line the bucket with newspaper to absorb excess liquid.

Worm Bins can be purchased, or you can construct your own. The important elements in a worm composting system are: 1) bedding material—about 8 inches of shredded leaves or newspaper strips will work; 2) air circulation—drill several holes near the top of your container, or in the lid; and 3) about ½ to 1 pound of red wiggler worms. Two 5-gallon buckets, one (with a lid) inserted into the other, can be used to create a simple worm composter. Start by drilling small holes in the bottom of the lidded bucket that will hold the bedding material, kitchen scraps, and worms. This allows excess liquid to drain into the second, un-drilled bucket. Also drill a few holes near the top of the bucket that will house the worms, or in the lid.



A newspaper liner absorbs excess liquid in a kitchen compost container.

Do Compost:

- Vegetable and fruit scraps
- Bread scraps, in moderation
- Grains
- Coffee grounds and filters
- Tea bags
- Crushed eggshells

Don't Compost

- Meat, bones
- Fish
- Dairy products
- Grease and oils



In addition to kitchen scraps, red wiggler worms dine on newspaper strips and dried leaves.

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Resources:

New Jersey Green Building Manual: Composting
<http://greenmanual.rutgers.edu/newcommercial/strategies/composting.pdf>
Pennsylvania DEP: Worm Your Way into Composting!
<http://www.dep.state.pa.us/dep/deputate/airwaste/wm/recycle/worm/worm1.htm>