



Kitchen-based composting

Save those scraps so you can grow better herbs, vegetables, fruits, and flowers.

THE THRIFTIEST COOKS ARE great at making ingredients work double duty by reusing them in creative ways. Composting takes the notion a step further; saved food scraps can break down into a nutrient-rich mixture you can use to improve your garden's soil.

Composting isn't an all-or-nothing proposition. You can start small by saving coffee grounds or go all out by devoting a corner of your yard to making what gardeners call "black gold."

The easiest option

Keep the grounds from your morning coffee. Spread a thin layer at the bottom of established plants that prefer acidic soil, such as strawberries, tomatoes, ferns, and azaleas, then cover with an inch of leaves or grass clippings to create a mini compost pile, says Emily Bishton, a Seattle garden designer and educator. Not a coffee drinker? Arrange to pick up leftover grounds at your local coffee shop.

STORE IT: Choose an eco-friendly container like the **Bamboo Compost Pail** ▼ to collect your grounds until you're ready to use them. It's small and attractive enough to store on your countertop and has a charcoal filter to help eliminate odor (\$40; www.cleanairgardening.com or 214-819-9500).

Middle ground

When ready to expand your composting efforts, consider adding more materials. Collect items that will easily decompose—paper towels, tea bags, coffee filters, eggshells, and greens are all good options. Avoid meat or dairy scraps; they don't decompose as quickly. Layer items with a handful of dried leaves, straw, or sawdust to aid decomposition and minimize moisture and odors. Periodically agitate or stir the mixture to speed decomposition. In about two months, you'll have finished compost. Apply to soil before planting, or tuck around plants.

COMPOST IT: The **Indoor Kitchen Composter** (\$70;

store.compostguide.com/index or 214-363-5170) works naturally and is odor-free. Or accelerate the process with automated indoor composters from **NatureMill** ▼ (starting at \$200; www.naturemill.com or 800-613-6629). In as little as two weeks a red light illuminates, indicating that your compost is ready.



Go big

Mark a 9-foot-square section in your yard, and create layers of compost material. "It's like making lasagna," says Sam McCarthy, owner of Santa Fe Premium Compost in New Mexico.

Start with a layer of dried leaves or straw; water. Follow with a thinner layer of food scraps and/or plant waste. Add a thin layer of soil, and water again. (The pile should feel similar to a damp dishrag.) If too wet, or you want the pile to break down faster, aerate by mixing—turn over materials a shovelful at a

time. Aerating every day can yield finished compost in a month or two; leaving alone can take six months or more, McCarthy says. Add to your pile, using the same formula, until it's about three feet high; leave it to compost and start another pile.

MECHANIZE IT: The **Back Porch Compost Tumbler** ► spins for easy aerating, making the process much easier (\$239; www.gardeners.com or 800-955-3370). —Heidi Ernst

ON THE WEB

Grow your own herbs
Compost makes a great base for an herb garden; find success with our beginner's guide.
CookingLight.com/features

