

Your Guide On How to Make a Compost Bin

A compost bin is a smart way to put food scraps to good use—and no, it won't smell up your apartment.

When it comes to food, everyone's trying to make the most of what they have right now, avoiding frequent trips to the grocery store (or subscribing to grocery delivery services), getting creative with pantry staples, and trying to cut back on food waste. Even after you've taken your food scraps as far as they can reasonably go from an edible perspective (i.e., making "trash cocktails" out of citrus peels or leftover vegetable skins), you can go one step further, using them in compost rather than throwing them in the garbage.

So what is compost, exactly? It's basically a mixture of decayed organic matter that's used for fertilizing and conditioning land—or on a smaller level, your garden or potted plants, according to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). It's easier than it sounds to make a compost bin, even if you're limited on space. And no, it won't end up smelling up your home. Here's how composting can be beneficial, how to make a compost bin, and how to ultimately use your compost.

How to Use Compost

If you're feeding the compost correctly week to week (meaning: regularly adding food scraps to the bin), it should be ready to nurture your plants in about 90 days, says Amy Padolk, director of education for Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden in Coral Gables, Florida. "Compost is ready to be used when it looks, feels, and smells like rich dark earth, has a crumbly soil at the top, and the original organic material [is] no longer recognizable," she adds. After you achieve all of these things, you should add about 30 to 50 percent compost to your soil blend for plants in containers or raised beds. For outdoor plants, you can shovel or sprinkle about 1/2-inch-thick layer of compost around the stems and planting beds, explains Padolk.