

# TAKE & MAKE KIT

## Compost

TIME: 45 minutes (not including decomposition time)

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## What's in this kit?

Compost is a mixture of decaying natural materials to enrich your soil. Also known as "Black Gold," this nutrient rich mixture of plants and food scraps is a great soil enhancer to grow healthy plants. Use this kit to make your own compost and herb garden!

### You will learn:

- Composting
- Upcycling
- Growing herbs from seed

## Let's get started!

### Materials

32 oz container with a lid  
Shredded paper  
Soil  
Herb seeds  
Compost label

### Tools

Scissors  
Something to stir with  
(find a stick from outside  
or use a fork, spoon, or  
similar)

This project will also use the plastic bag and paper bag that this kit comes in, so keep them handy.

## Step 1 - Organize your materials

Separate your materials. Keep your soil, seeds, and paper bag somewhere for safe keeping.

You can store your shredded paper in the paper bag this kit comes in.



### Predictions!

How long will it take for the materials in your compost to break down?

## Step 2 - Poke holes to allow airflow

Take your scissors or a pen and your plastic container lid. Poke 8 or more holes through the lid. The holes should be about as wide as the pen you're poking with. You can use a towel or a piece of fabric underneath to ease poking the hole. These holes will allow airflow to come into the container, allowing your compost to break down quicker.



### Vocabulary

**Compost:** A mixture of decaying natural materials such as vegetables, fruits, coffee grounds, plant clippings, and wood products. As the mixture decays, the material is known as compost and is rich in nutrients that help plants grow when mixed with soil.

**Decay:** The state or process of rotting or decomposition.

**Upcycling:** Reusing discarded objects or material in such a way as to create a product of higher quality or value than the original.

### Step 3 - Gather your dry organic matter

Grab your gallon bag and go outside to gather some dry organic matter for your compost bin. This could include leaves and grass clippings. Twigs will not break down quickly so do not include them in the bag. Keep this gallon bag full of dry materials handy as you will be putting materials from it into your compost bin as you add materials to your compost pile.



### Step 4 - Gather the wet organic matter

Now start gathering your wet organic matter. This could include: fruit scraps, vegetable scraps, or used coffee grounds.

This is a great opportunity to reduce kitchen waste! Keep your plastic container handy when cooking. Instead of throwing away fruit and vegetable peelings, put them in your compost!

Cut down your wet compostable materials into small pieces to allow for a faster breakdown time.

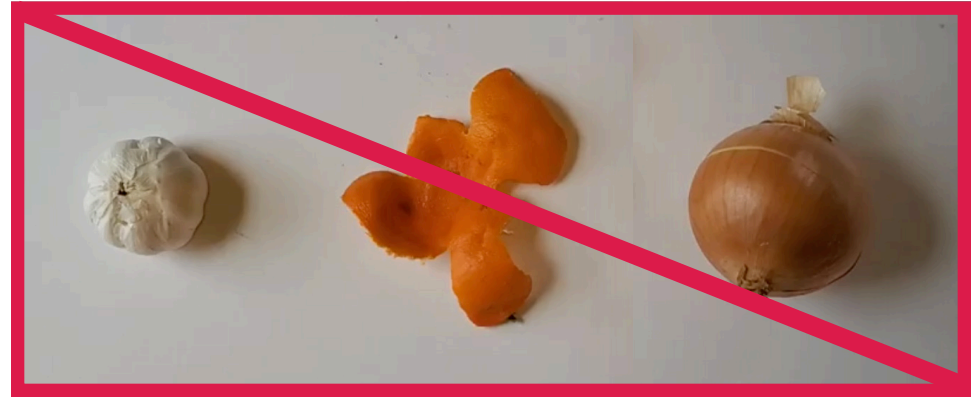


### Step 5 - What NOT to put in the compost bin

Do not put in anything that has meat, fat or grease. Don't use anything coated in oil or used in a frying pan.

Some people use citrus peels and eggshells, but they take longer to break down. Consider using those items for a later round of compost.

Don't use onions or garlic as they have been known to repel earthworms, a crucial component to a healthy compost.



### Step 6 - Mix the wet and dry organic matter together

As your collection of wet matter grows, add in some of the dry matter you collected. Your mixture should be 3 parts wet materials and 1 part dry materials.

Stir your mixture once a week to make sure the materials fully break down.



## Step 7 - Troubleshooting

If your compost mixture is too wet, add more dry goods and mix them into the bin. If your compost mixture is too dry, add more wet materials. You can even water it lightly or spray it with a spray bottle. You are aiming for a warm, damp mixture.



## Step 8 - Now add TIME!



Your compost pile won't break down overnight. It will take about 3 months for your materials to break down. Getting your compost warm is what speeds up the breakdown time. To speed things up, you can wrap your plastic container with the brown paper bag this kit came with. Use the tape to secure it into place. You can keep your bin in the sunlight to give it warmth. If you have a yard, porch, or outdoor windowsill you can keep your compost container outside and this will warm it up, speeding up the decaying time.

The kit also comes with a sticker that you can put on your compost bin. This is where you can write what day you started the compost bin, track the decomposition progress, and discover ways to learn more about the environment while you wait.

### MAKE YOUR OWN COMPOST

Compost Start Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Wait 6-8 weeks from start date to use your compost

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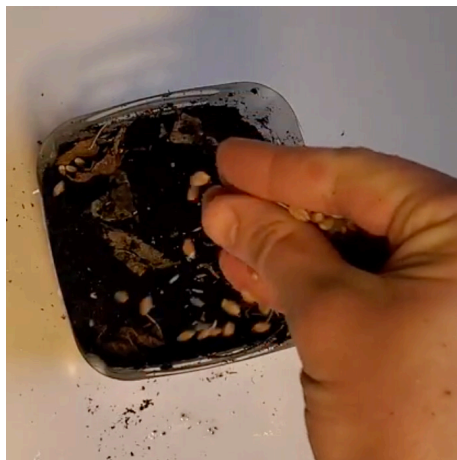
## Step 9 - Finally use the compost! Plant your seeds!

You can now use the compost! Use an equal mix of planting soil and compost for increased success growing plants. You can use a larger plastic container from your recycling bin to create a pot for your seeds. Reusing an item for a new purpose like this is called upcycling. Find an open top container or cut off the top of a container to allow a plant to grow. Cut holes on the bottom of the container to allow water to drain out.



If you have access to rocks or sticks, make a pile of these at the bottom of the pot and put the soil and compost mixture on top. Now plant your seeds in the soil and just press them down about a half inch below the soil. Begin by watering your seeds with just a little bit of water with a spoon or a spray bottle if available.

Remember this is just a starter kit for compost. You can make a larger compost bin with a bucket or trash can. Make a big batch of this and plant more plants for a larger harvest!



## Go Beyond!

Take it a step further! Check out our partner organization, the Urban Ecology Center. At the Urban Ecology Center's three locations the wonders of the outdoors bring curious people together in nature.

The Urban Ecology Center provides year-round educational programs for kids, families and adults of all ages. The cornerstone program is the Neighborhood Environmental Education Project serving kids in 60 Milwaukee schools each year. This program enables students to take a walk in the woods, stand in a river in hip waders, or run along the beach at Lake Michigan.

In addition to NEEP we offer even more programs for you and your family:

- Urban Adventures
- Weekend youth and family programs
- High School Outdoor Leader program
- Adult summer internships
- Community Science research projects
- Volunteer activities
- Equipment lending for members
- Even more!



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MESS  
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GEEK OUT.



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