



Composting

Why is compost called “Black Gold”?

Compost is sometimes referred to as “black gold” because it recycles organic materials otherwise regarded as waste into an extremely valuable soil supplement for your plants and garden. It is the perfect nutrient-rich food for your plants, and it reduces the need for watering when used as organic mulch.

Over a quarter of all household garbage is made up of compostable food scraps. Composting takes these unused resources – vegetable peelings, grass and leaves, tea bags, eggshells and coffee grinds – and turns them into something of great value: essential fuel for the soil.

Finished compost looks just like good rich black soil and will have a pleasant earthy smell. Compost can be used as mulch or a soil supplement and can be added liberally to your houseplants, lawn and gardens.

It takes between six months and two years from when you begin the composting process to get your ‘Black Gold’.

Starting a home composting program

We’re encouraging all residents to do their part to create a greener, sustainable future for Lacombe and area by starting a home composting program. By composting in your backyard, you can turn your organic household waste into a valuable soil supplement that offers many long-term benefits for your lawn and garden.

Composting is easy! You don’t need any technical knowledge or equipment. Just follow the steps in the ‘Guide to Black Gold’ (that comes with your composter) and you will be on your way to earthy riches - for your soil that is.

Start composting today

To help residents start composting at home, the City of Lacombe has a limited supply of 'Earth Machine' composters, along with rain barrels, for sale at City Hall. For more information, please call (403) 782-6666.

How do I set up my composter?

1. Find a level spot in your yard that gets a lot of sunlight.
2. Start with a layer of finished compost or topsoil; this will introduce the microorganisms needed.
3. Alternate your layers between the 'brown' and 'green' materials.
4. Periodically add a layer of topsoil.
5. Turn and aerate the compost periodically. This is necessary for the survival of the aerobic and helps reduce odours.
6. If the pile is too dry it should be watered until it is moist. Be careful not to use too much water. If you do, add more dry materials to absorb the water.
7. It is a good sign when your compost pile heats up as this tells you the material is being consumed by microorganisms.

What items can I compost?

- **Kitchen greens:** Fruit scraps, vegetable scraps, houseplant cuttings, coffee grounds, rice and pasta, egg shells and tea bags
- **Kitchen browns:** Coffee filters, stale bread, paper napkins and towels, dryer lint, hair
- **Yard greens:** Flowers, vegetables, plant trimmings, hedge clippings and grass (small amounts)
- **Yard browns:** Leaves, straw or hay, small twigs/chips, dried grass and weeds

Do not compost:

- Barbecue charcoal
- Coal ash
- Meats
- Dairy products
- Bones
- Oils
- Diseased or insect infested plants
- Feces
- Weeds with mature seeds

Composting tips

- Break the materials down into small pieces; this allows the material to break down quicker in the composter.
- Cover food waste with topsoil or other compostable materials to avoid attracting insects and animals.
- Save some leaves during fall to add to the compost in the summer months; the high carbon content will help offset excess nitrogen levels and prevent odours from developing.

How do I maintain my composter?

- Add fresh materials often, and be sure to mix them into the materials below.
- Turn your compost pile once a week. This helps with bringing materials from the outer part into the center to create even rates of decomposition.
- Monitor the moisture level; add water if pile is too dry or add dry materials if the pile is too moist.
- Remove finished compost; finished compost is dark brown, crumbly, lightweight and has an earthy odor.

Compost troubleshooting

Problem	Problem Cause	Solution
Bad odour	Too many greens	Add browns and mix. Turn pile and top with soil.
Smells like rotten eggs	Not enough air	Turn pile for several days until odour is gone. Top with soil.
Pile is not composting	Too dry	Moisten with water until pile is damp.
Flies around pile	Exposed food scraps	Bury food or cover with a layer of soil.
Unwelcome animal visitors (dogs, rodents)	Exposed food or wrong items added	Remove any meats, fats or dairy products. Bury food scraps and cover with soil.