



How to Build Your Own

Composter

BY LOGAN KUGLER

Feeding your soil its natural diet will make your garden and lawn thrive. By enriching it with compost, you'll keep the ground moist and supply macro- and micronutrients that create ideal conditions for growing your own fresh herbs, vegetables and flowers this summer. Building this four-foot-square composter with removable front boards is easy and relatively cheap (about \$55 for wood and nails), and it will protect your pile from the elements.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MISHA GRAVENOR

Materials You Will Need

- Eight 2x8s (8 feet long)
- Six 2x4s (33 inches long)
- One 1/2-inch-wide wood scrap (as a measuring guide)
- One box of 100 3-inch-long galvanized nails
- Burlap sheet (5 feet square)

Tools You Will Need

- Circular saw
- Sawhorse
- Measuring tape
- Pencil
- Hammer

To prolong the life of your composter, use wood preserved with ammoniacal copper quaternary, or use reclaimed wood as we did below.



2
Hours

Building Steps:

1. Measure four of the 2x8s at the four-foot mark and cut them in half, giving you eight pieces that are each four feet long. Measure and cut the four remaining boards at the 4'3" mark; this will yield four 4'3" pieces and four 3'9" pieces.

2. For one side of the bin, place two of the 33-inch 2x4s on the ground (two-inch sides facing up), spacing them four feet apart.

3. & 4. Nail four of the four-foot 2x8s across the 2x4s. For adequate air flow, leave at least half an inch of space between each board (use your 1/2-inch-wide wood scrap to measure spaces). Repeat to build the second side.

5. Connect the two sides: Nail the four 4'3" 2x8s into the four-inch side of the 2x4s, spacing each of the boards at least half an inch apart.

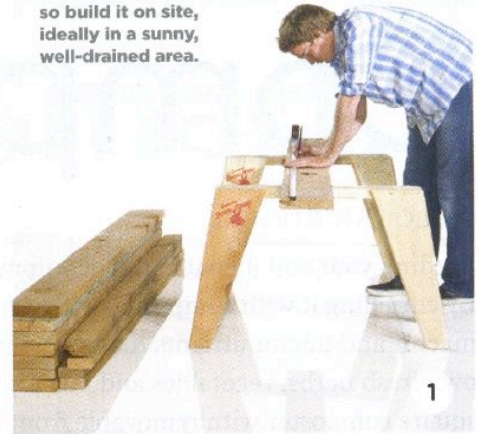
6. & 7. Now create a slot for the four remaining 3'9" boards that will serve as the composter's removable front (which gives you access to turn the pile). Nail one of your 33-inch 2x4s two inches behind the 2x4 on the front right side and another behind the 2x4 on the front left side.

8. & 9. To keep the removable boards separated for air flow, drive nails into either end of the top edge of three, leaving 1/2-inch of the nailhead protruding (as in step 3, use wood scrap to measure). The boards will rest on the heads of the nails below them.

10. & 11. Your composter is now ready for use. Shield its contents from the elements with the five-foot-square burlap cloth.



The composter will weigh about 100 pounds, so build it on site, ideally in a sunny, well-drained area.





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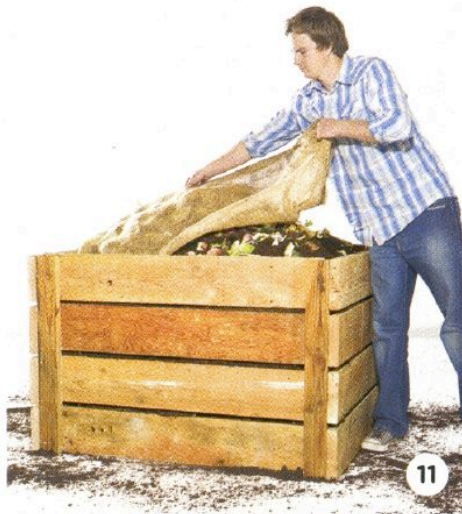
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WHAT YOU CAN AND CAN'T COMPOST

In moderation, almost any organic material is suitable for a compost pile. But avoid too much of any one thing: The idea is to create an even mix of brown (carbon) and green (nitrogen) materials.

Compost...

- Apple cores, banana peels, watermelon rinds, and any other fruit or vegetable peelings
- Beverages (to moisten the pile)
- Bio-based plastics
- Cardboard
- Coffee grounds and filters
- Dryer lint
- Eggshells (rinsed and crushed)
- Grass clippings
- Hair
- Pine needles
- Sawdust
- Shredded leaves
- Shredded newspaper
- Tea bags

Don't Compost...

- Cat litter
- Chicken or fish bones
- Dairy products (milk, cheese, yogurt), meat and fish, which will attract pests and smell bad
- Diseased plants
- Fireplace ashes
- Sod
- Soil amendments with lime
- Weeds

Each time you add to the pile, turn it, which helps materials compost more quickly and reduces pests.