
Make Garden Waste Disappear the Easy Way: Pit/Trench Composting

The simplest garden waste composting is just to bury it. Dig a hole about a foot deep. Throw in the plants wastes. Cover with at least 8 inches of additional soil. That's it. Depending on soil temperature, the supply of microorganisms in the soil and the content of the materials, decomposition will occur in one month to one year.



Food waste burial can be done randomly in unused areas of the garden or in an organized system. One system is to bury scraps in holes dug around empty sections of the plot throughout the growing season. Another system, best for end-of-season, is to dig a trench about a foot deep as a "row" in the garden and fill it with all the vines, stems and plants until level with the surface, then mound the original soil back over the top. An English system of trench composting, sometimes called Vertical Composting, maintains a three season rotation of soil incorporation and growing.

Once you cover the material in the hole or trench with the original soil you dug out, it will form a slight mound – not as high as you'd think because the weight of the soil will compress the plant materials. That mound quickly drops as the plant material is processed and incorporated into the soil and distributed by the worms and other soil-dwellers. A good watering helps settle it faster.

Whichever on-site compost system you prefer, it is a work-saver.

Trench composting does not require the additional work of chopping, turning, or even carrying the wastes out of the garden. No worries about smells or CN ratios or moisture levels. No heavy lifting, layering or aerating. Best of all it keeps all the your garden plot, ready for next feeders to access. Just plant those peppers, squash or watermelons, right on that hole or trench next roots will reach deep to find that rich humus layer and reward you with a bumper-crop next year.



plant nutrients in year's heavy tomatoes, potatoes or corn spring. The buried nutrient-

NOTE: The Rules for Composting still apply. Do NOT bury noxious weeds, weeds in seed, diseased plants, dairy or meat products.

The Many “Other” Ways of Composting

Adding organic matter to the soil is a vital component to soil health and crop yield. Composting is a good thing. Many people think the traditional bin or three-bin system, or containers or even tumblers – all large and cumbersome – are the only way to compost. These methods are for “hot” compost where the mass is needed to produce the heat for weed seed and disease control.

But there is a whole bunch of other ways! They just need a more careful selection of what you are composting. For the below methods do not use noxious weeds or weeds in seed, do not use plants that sprout freely from root pieces (such as quackgrass or thistles), do not use diseased plant materials. But this is a great way to turn your fruit and vegetable wastes, grass and leaves, and kitchen scraps into rich garden compost with little work and small spaces, such as a community garden plot. Here are some variations to fit situations where a traditional bin or pile just doesn’t fit.

Sheet Composting Let it decay, then turn it under – best done in fall



Sheet composting is a way to obtain the benefits of decayed organic material without building a composting pile. Sheet composting involves spreading a thin layer of organic materials, such as leaves, over a garden area. The materials are then tilled in with a hoe, spade, garden fork, or rotary tiller. Leaves, garden debris, weeds, grass clippings, and vegetative food scraps are examples of materials that can be easily tilled into the soil. To aid decomposition, materials should be shredded or chopped prior to layering.

To ensure adequate decomposition of organic materials before planting, it is best to do sheet composting in the fall. Spread a 2 to 4-inch layer of organic materials on the soil surface and till in. A rotary tiller will do the most thorough job of working materials into a vegetable garden. You can also carefully work the organic material in with a garden fork or hoe.

Pit composting Quick and Easy, bury it right in the garden plot

This is the simplest way for composting kitchen scraps. Dig a one-foot-deep hole. Chop and mix the food wastes into the soil then cover with at least 8 inches of additional soil. Depending on soil temperature, the supply of microorganisms in the soil and the content of the materials, decomposition will occur in one month to one year. Food waste burial can be done randomly in unused areas of the garden or in an organized system. This method is effective for those who want their decomposing organic matter to be completely out of sight. The deep hole is also a good place to stick those weedy plants you have pulled up. If buried deep enough, the weed seeds will not see the light of day, so they won’t resprout. The hole is probably best used to enrich an area you ultimately want to plant in.





Trench Composting Like Pit but bigger, more, deeper

Best for end-of-season, or when you have a lot of plant matter to incorporate at once, such as after a crop harvest. Clear an area in the plot at least a couple feet wide and as long as needed. Lay a tarp or cardboard along the area to pile soil on as you dig a trench about a foot deep as a “row” in the garden. Fill the trench with all the vines, stems and plants until level with the surface, then mound the original soil back over the top by pulling the tarp or cardboard over it. Water in well. The mound will drop as the plant material decomposes, and the trench will become a rich planting bed next season.

Vermicomposting Makes the most of small spaces

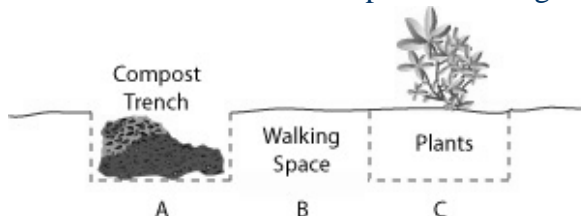
Vermicomposting uses worms to do the work. It is an excellent option for those living in apartments or other small spaces. Depending on what region of the country you live in, it can be done outdoors, in your basement, or in an attached garage. It can also be done in a 15-gallon container kept under the kitchen sink. You just need to bury your food waste under moistened bedding material. The bedding is made from shredded paper, dead leaves, or straw.

Worms are amazing little workers. Red wigglers (*Eisenia fetida*) are best suited for home composting. They are comfortable living in an opaque box filled with bedding material, and will reproduce and happily eat your food waste. Worm castings are a rich, desirable amendment for everything in your garden. When vermicomposting, however, you’ll need to keep all food scraps buried to keep fruit flies from becoming a nuisance.



Vertical (English) Composting Like Pit but bigger, more, deeper, organized

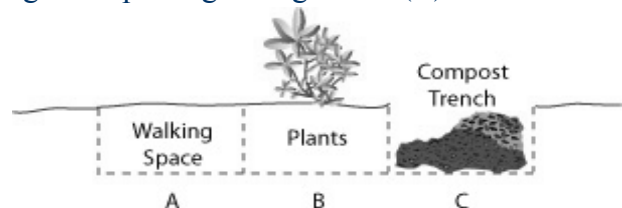
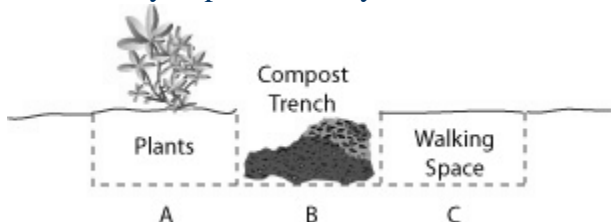
This English system, sometimes known as trench or vertical composting, maintains a three season rotation or soil incorporation and growing.



Divide garden space into 3’ wide rows.

Year 1 – Dig a 1’ foot wide trench on the left 1/3 of the 3’ area (A). Add compostable materials in this trench and cover with soil when half full. Leave the center 1’ section open for a path (B), and plant your crop in the remaining 1’ strip along the right side (C).

Year 2 – Section A is a path for year 2 allowing time for the Materials to break down. Plant your crop in section B. Section C, where you planted last year, becomes the compost trench.



Year 3 – Section A is now ready for planting. Section B is your trench for composting. Section C is in the second year of composting is it will be the path.

Please check with your community garden rules and practices to see which of these methods are allowed at your garden.