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## **Don't Trash that Banana Peel - Composting is an Easy, Eco-friendly Alternative**

Recycling is certainly not a new concept. In fact, gardeners have been using one form of recycling - composting - for about as long as people have tilled the soil. Composting is a cost-effective, eco-friendly way to give your garden a boost.

Start your compost pile now, before winter settles in, and come spring you'll have a jump on nutrient-rich compost to help your garden produce its best harvest. Composting happens by itself through natural decay and the breakdown of organic matter. Depending on your local climate, the composting process may not be fully completed with useable humus or compost until temperatures warm up.

"Composting is easy and can be done for as little as \$10 - or even free if you build your own bin," says Bruce Augustin, senior director in research and development with Scotts. "It's a great way to provide essential nutrients to your soil, while recycling kitchen and yard waste, which helps keep refuse out of landfills."

It's easy to get started composting: find a bin, gather materials, build your pile and compost. Augustin offers the following easy-to-follow steps for getting started:

### Begin with a bin

Containing your compost pile in a bin saves space, hastens decomposition and helps keep the pile neat. You can find many pre-made compost bins at home centers and garden stores. Or, you can build your own from plans found on the Internet with materials around your home.

### Gather materials

There are two main sources of materials for your compost pile - your yard and your kitchen. From the yard, you can gather leaves, grass and plant clippings, and shrub or tree trimmings. From the kitchen, add fruit and vegetable peelings, coffee grounds (including the filters), tea bags and eggshells. It's okay to toss in shredded newspaper (not colored or shiny newsprint since these don't decompose readily), but avoid meat scraps, bones, dairy products, grease or pet or human waste since these can all harbor harmful bacteria.

### Build your pile

You should build your pile in layers, starting with a 4- to 6-inch layer of coarse material such as twigs or shrub clippings. Then, add on 3 to 4 inches of grass clippings. Next, add another 4- to 6-inch layer of leaves or garden debris and soak with water; moisture will help the microbes decompose the material faster. You can modify this order as needed, depending on the types of materials you have. After a few layers, be sure to add a 1-inch layer of garden soil, such as Miracle-Gro Garden Soil for Flowers and Vegetables.

#### Maintain compost

"A high-nitrogen fertilizer like Miracle-Gro Water Soluble All Purpose Plant Food, spread over each layer of your compost pile, will help the composting process by creating a favorable nitrogen to carbon ratio," says Augustin. Remember to turn or aerate the pile periodically to help move material from the outside closer to the center of the pile, where it will heat up and decompose faster. During the winter - depending on the region where you live - the center of the pile is where decomposition will take place, and adding water to keep the pile moist will aid the process.

Your compost will be ready to use once it has turned dark and crumbly, and gives off an earthy odor. Add the compost to your garden soil to help nourish your plants.

"Composting is not only beneficial for your garden, but it's also an easy, satisfying way to do something good for the environment," Augustin says.

For more tips on composting and other aspects of gardening and lawn care, visit [www.Scotts.com](http://www.Scotts.com).