



**Organic
Waste
Diversion**

Backyard Composter Program Resident Guide

 Chatham-Kent

 Chatham-Kent



Welcome to the Backyard Composter Program

Backyard composting is an easy way to reduce waste and create healthy compost for your garden. This program provides residents with the tools and information needed to compost at home with confidence.

By composting at home, residents can turn kitchen scraps and yard waste into high-quality compost at no cost, perfect for growing healthier gardens and greener yards. Composting also helps reduce the amount of organic waste sent to landfill, supporting a cleaner and more sustainable Chatham-Kent.

About the Program

The Backyard Composter Program is Phase 1 of the **Municipality's Organic Waste Diversion Program**, approved by Council on March 17, 2025.



How to Purchase a Backyard Composter

Backyard composters are available at participating municipal service centres or by calling 3-1-1.

Cost: **\$20** per composter (HST included)



What Is Composting and Why Compost?



Composting is the natural process of breaking down food scraps and other organic materials into a soil-like material called compost. Microorganisms, air, and moisture work together to break down organic waste over time.

Composting happens naturally, but a backyard composter helps manage the process by controlling moisture, airflow, and material balance.

Why Compost at Home?

- Reduces the amount of organic waste sent to landfill
- Improves soil health and helps soil retain moisture
- Returns valuable nutrients and organic matter back to the soil

By composting more and landfilling less, residents support provincial waste reduction goals while helping keep long-term waste management costs more manageable for the community.



About Your Backyard Composter



There are many composting options available, including homemade wooden bins, wire enclosures, and manufactured composters.

The backyard composter provided through this program is designed to:

- Be easy to set up and use, with no construction required
- Provide good ventilation to support effective composting
- Help protect contents from rain and snow, supporting moisture control
- Accommodate regular household food scraps

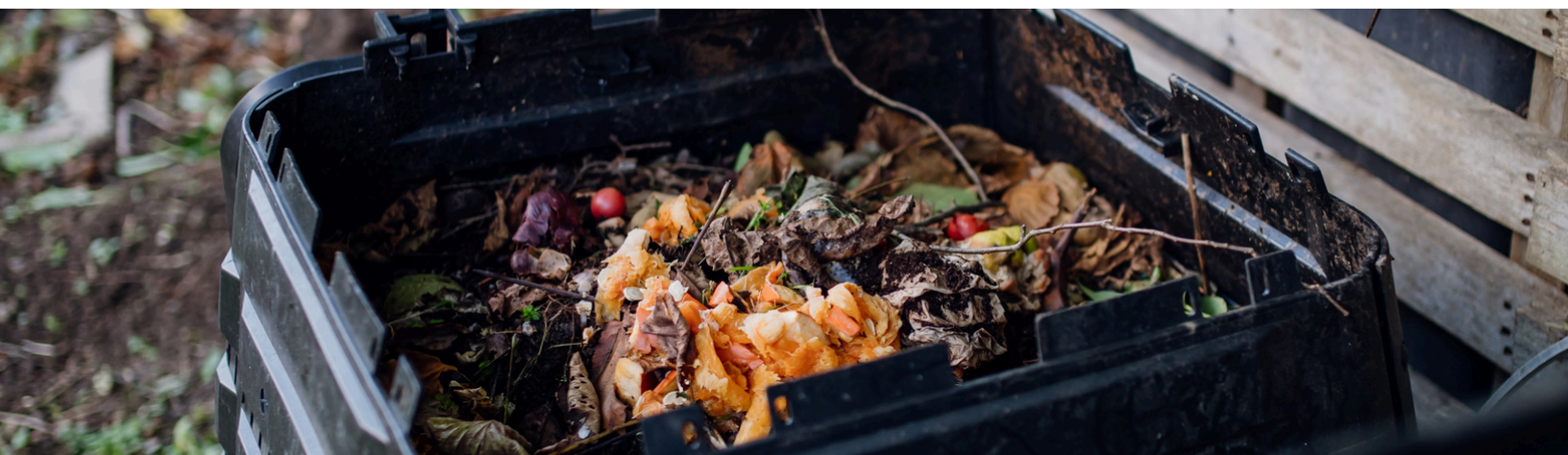
This type of composter has a fixed capacity and is commonly suitable for small to medium households (approximately 4–5 people), depending on use and maintenance. Households that generate larger volumes of organic waste or garden extensively may choose to supplement with other composting methods.

Getting Started

Placement Tips

- Place the composter directly on soil to allow drainage and access for beneficial organisms
- Choose a well-drained location that is easy to access year-round
- Partial sun is ideal; avoid areas that remain overly wet

Once placed, your composter is ready to use.



What to Compost

Successful composting depends on balancing two types of materials.



Greens (nitrogen-rich)

- Fruit and vegetable scraps
- Coffee grounds and filters
- Tea bags (plastic-free only)
- Fresh grass clippings
- Egg shells (crushed eggshells break down faster)



Browns (carbon-rich)

- Dry leaves
- Straw or hay
- Shredded newspaper or cardboard
- Paper towels
- Small twigs, wood chips, or sawdust



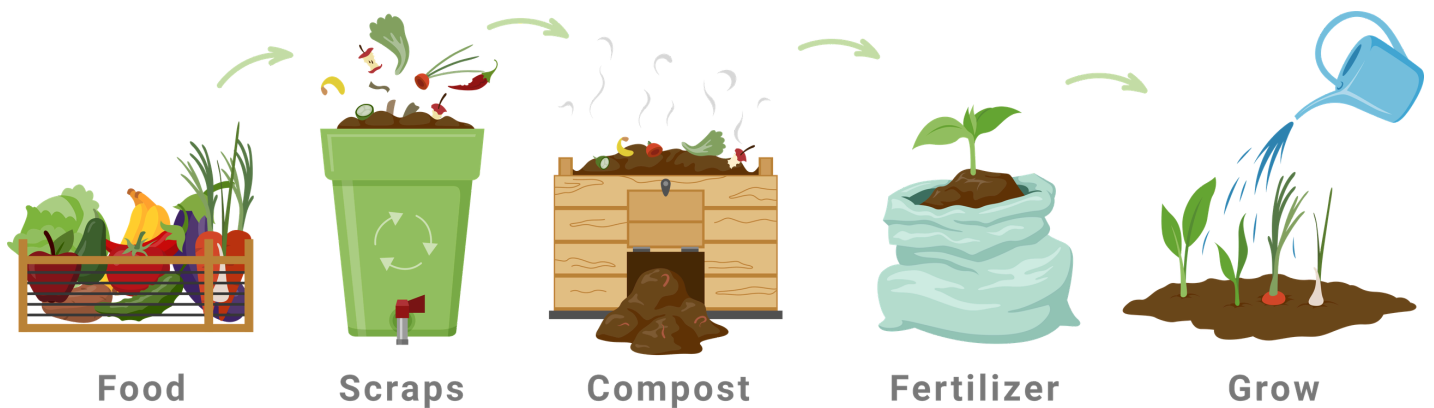
Do Not Add

- Meat, fish, bones, or dairy products
- Bread
- Cooking oils or fats
- Pet waste
- Plastics, glass, or metal
- Chemically treated wood
- Crabgrass or fast-growing weeds

How to Compost

- Start with a layer of brown material at the bottom
- Add green materials, then cover with browns
- Keep compost moist but not soaking wet; think of a damp towel, not a dripping wet sponge
- Turn or mix the contents every 1–2 weeks to add air and support decomposition

Composting is a natural process that takes time. Composting continues year-round. Decomposition slows during winter and resumes more actively in warmer months.



Troubleshooting Tips



Bad Smell

Add more brown materials and mix to improve airflow



Too Wet

Add dry leaves or shredded paper and mix



Pests

Avoid prohibited materials and keep food scraps covered



Slow Breakdown

Cut materials into smaller pieces, check moisture, and turn more frequently



Harvesting & Using Compost

Finished compost is dark, crumbly, and smells earthy. With regular maintenance, compost may be ready in one year or more.

Use finished compost to:

- Improve garden soil
- Enrich flower beds and planters
- Add organic matter around trees and shrubs

Backyard Composter Program FAQs

How long will it take before I can use my compost?

Finished compost typically takes several months to one year or more. Active management can speed up the process.

Do I have to maintain my composter?

Yes. Composting requires basic maintenance, including adding a balance of greens and browns, turning or mixing materials, and monitoring moisture levels.

Why isn't my compost breaking down?

Common reasons include dry conditions, large food pieces, poor balance of materials, or cold temperatures. Adjust moisture, cut materials smaller, or add more material as needed.

How do I stop my composter from smelling bad?

Odours usually indicate too much wet green material and not enough air. Add browns, turn the compost, and keep food scraps covered.

Where do I get a compost bin?

Backyard composters are available through the Chatham-Kent Backyard Composter Program at participating municipal service centres or by calling 3-1-1.

Need Help?

If you are having trouble with your composter:

- Review the tips in this guide
- Visit www.chatham-kent.ca/organics for composting resources
- Call Chatham-Kent Customer Service at 3-1-1 for program-related questions

Composting is a learning process, and small adjustments can make a big difference.

Stay Involved

Composting is a simple and effective way to reduce household waste. Residents are encouraged to share what they've learned with neighbours or share their composting experience online through Let's Talk Chatham-Kent.

letstalkchatham-kent.ca/organic-waste

Together, we are working toward a cleaner and more sustainable Chatham-Kent.

