

# Choosing the right compost bin

## Composting at home

Before starting out, it is important to consider the following:

- How much space do I have?
- Do I have the time to maintain a composter?
- What kind of budget do I have?
- Does my municipality or an organisation in my area offer training in composting?



In order to make the right decision considering the many models of composters available, here is some basic criteria to consider:

### > Ease of use

- **Choose a composter that can easily be disassembled or that is equipped with a hatch.**

#### **Square frame composters:**

- Very basic, made of wood, and easy to take apart without the use of tools.
- Others, are enclosed bins that either require the removal of one or all four sides, or being emptied with a shovel.

**Bolt-type composters:** bolts screwed to the outside make compost easier to access.

**Cylindrical composters:** these are generally not easy to disassemble.

### > Aeration

- Air circulation within your composter is essential. However the openings must not be too large (compost will dry out) or too small (mold).
- To ensure proper ventilation (with an aerator, a fork or a stick), the bin must not be too narrow or too high.

### > Material

- **Composters made of wood**, are rot-resistant if treated with natural oils, require minimal maintenance but possibly some repairs. Do not use wood that has been chemically treated (chemicals may contaminate your compost).
- **Plastic composters** are better able to retain heat during the winter.

### > Volume

- A 300-litre bin should accommodate a two-person household.
- Standard commercial composters have a volume in the order of 250 to 300 litres, which is sufficient to accommodate plants from a 300 m<sup>2</sup> garden.
- It is ideal to have two compost bins, such that you can switch to the second one once the first has been filled. A third bin can also be added for surplus dry/brown materials, which can also be kept in a pile.

## Bottomless Composter

A bottomless plastic or wooden box with a lid. Most are either square or round. This composter must be placed directly on the soil (not on grass).

It is the recommended option if you have a yard, a small or medium-sized budget, and little time.

- Cost:**
- Low cost or free if you make it yourself with recovered materials.
  - On average, between \$30 and \$100 at the time of purchase, depending on the model.

### Care and Use:

- Aeration is only necessary every 7 to 10 days (by puncturing the contents with an aerator fork or stick\*), maintain a 2:1 ratio of dry (brown) and moist (green) materials and control for moisture content (wet like a twisted sponge).
- **If it is made of wood**
  - Wood decomposes naturally and you may want to protect it with a natural organic oil such as linseed oil.
  - To do so, it is necessary to empty the contents of the composter before it is cleaned, treated and can be filled once again.
  - To avoid contaminating the compost with toxic residues, do not chemically treat the bin (varnish, dye, paint or any other chemical).
  - Types of wood that decompose slowly, such as cedar, are not recommended as they repel the types of insect necessary for the decomposition of materials and will slow the process.
  - Bins made from untreated wood or pallets can be used to compost fairly large quantities of material.
  - There are numerous guides or videos explaining how to build your own composter out of wood or plastic storage bins available on the Internet.
- **If it is made of plastic:**
  - Minimal maintenance.
  - Check that all hatches or openings are large enough and that the volume and aeration are suited for your needs.



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### Advantages:

- This is the best composting method: direct contact with the soil allows for the migration of insects and microorganisms.
- They are easy to find.
- They are low cost or free, especially if handmade.

### Disadvantages:

- Requires a yard (must be directly on the ground with a minimum space of around 1 m<sup>2</sup>).
- Bins made from wood may require some maintenance and repairs.
- The process is slowed or stopped during the winter.

\*Insert the stick vertically into the compost and move it in the shape of a cross to ensure air is properly introduced.

## Tumbling Composter



This system does not rest directly on the ground. Below the rotating component there is a compartment that collects the compost 'juice'.

Recommended if you have access to a balcony or a paved area, a significant budget, and little time.

**Cost:**

- On average, between \$190 and \$250, depending on the model.

### Care and Use:

- The rotating component should be turned about three times per week.
- The lower compartment (containing the 'juice') must be emptied three times per year to avoid over accumulation.

### Advantages:

- Does not require access to land.
- Compost juice can be used as a fertilizer (e.g. for indoor plants).
- Produces compost fairly quickly (4 to 6 weeks).

### Disadvantages:

- The handling of the 'juice' may prove inconvenient for some people.
- If installed on a balcony, the composter should be well protected to keep the 'juice' from overflowing in case of rain (can inconvenience downstairs neighbours).
- It is important to not forget to empty the compartment to avoid overflow/leakage.
- The compost 'juice' is not as rich as a bottomless compost (certain insects and worms present in the soil, which improve decomposition, are absent from tumbling composters).
- In winter, the composting process is almost completely stopped.



**To prevent drying out, a lid is essential. If your compost bin does not have one use an old tarp to cover it.**

### Other tips

- Keep a sealable container in the refrigerator for your table scraps; this will keep fruit flies from invading while also avoiding numerous trips outside.
- What if you don't have a garden? Donate your compost to a school or community group who can use it (for landscaping or community gardens).

## Composting in heaps

As the name suggests, this composting method involves storing materials in heaps at the back of the garden. This makes it possible to compost large quantities and facilitates manipulation. However, materials stored in the open air can attract wildlife and is not especially aesthetic; it is recommended that heaps be covered with a tarp. Composting in heaps is best suited to large gardens or farms where neighbours are at a distance.

## Vermicomposter



Odorless and clean, is usually kept indoors (kitchen, garage, etc.) and **is only good for table scraps and wet/green materials**.

Recommended for those without land or a balcony, with a small budget (for the household option), who have time and are not put off by worms.

**Cost:** • Low cost or free (if handmade) to \$150 or more.

### Care and Use:



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- Necessary to ensure the worms have enough to eat (but not too much) and that it is balanced.
- The worms are not your common earthworms, but redworms or red wigglers that are found on farms or used as bait for fishing. These can be procured from organisations practicing large-scale vermicomposting or ordered online.

### Advantages:



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- Can be done indoors.
- Requires little space.
- Odorless and clean.
- Quick results (3 to 6 months).
- No need to water, stir or turn.
- Perfect if you do not have land or trees at home.
- Safe from the cold, is functional year-round, even in winter.
- Produces a powerful liquid fertilizer (highly concentrated in nutrients).
- There are numerous guides and videos explaining how to build your own vermicomposter with plastic storage bins on the Internet.
- Children enjoy it!

### Disadvantages:

- Even if the worms are **not removed** from the composter, it is sometimes necessary to manipulate them (when purchasing, or when removing the compost from the composter) which can turn some people off.
- Requires more attention: feeding the worms and not leaving them for long periods of time without paying attention to them (as you would for a pet).
- Worms are less interested in certain foods: ears of corn, citrus peel, onions, garlic, vinegar, spices, etc.
- If not properly balanced, it can attract fruit flies.

List of domestic compost bins available in Quebec (in French only)

[www.recyc-quebec.gouv.qc.ca/sites/default/files/documents/liste-composteurs-domestiques.pdf](http://www.recyc-quebec.gouv.qc.ca/sites/default/files/documents/liste-composteurs-domestiques.pdf)

To go even further, you can consult the guide entitled **Le compostage facilité** (in French only)

[www.recyc-quebec.gouv.qc.ca/sites/default/files/documents/Le\\_compostage\\_facilite.pdf](http://www.recyc-quebec.gouv.qc.ca/sites/default/files/documents/Le_compostage_facilite.pdf)