

# Composting

Composting is the art of turning organic waste into a rich soil amendment called humus. Backyard composting is easy to learn and is full of benefits for you and the environment. Organic wastes that can be composted include fruit and vegetable peelings, coffee grounds, grass clippings and leaves. Some things you should not include in your backyard compost include meat or dairy products and weed seeds.

## The Five Key Factors

To make an effective efficient compost pile, you need to consider these five key factors:

- **Food: The Fifty-Fifty Rule:** A perfect mixture of material consists of  $\frac{1}{2}$  brown (carbon-based) material and  $\frac{1}{2}$  green (nitrogen-based) material by weight.
- **Air: To Turn or Not to Turn:** The organisms that live inside your compost bin need air to survive. Mix or turn the pile three to five times per season using a pitchfork, garden hoe or shovel. Proper air space can make a big difference. You will know if your bin is not getting enough oxygen if the pile smells of ammonia.
- **Water: Moist, Not Damp:** The organisms need water to survive, but not too much or they will drown. The ideal moisture level of your compost pile should be like that of a wrung out sponge.
- **Surface Area: Small is Best:** Cut up or shred organic waste materials before placing them into the compost bin. This increases the surface area and speeds up decomposition. You can also store your kitchen scraps in your freezer to speed up decomposition.
- **Bin Volume: Not Too Big:** A bin should be between  $3 \text{ ft}^3$  and  $5 \text{ ft}^3$ . A bin that is too small cannot retain enough heat. If the bin is too large, it won't get enough air to the centre of the pile. It is also easier to manage two or three medium bins that one large one. You can build a compost bin yourself out of new or recycled materials, or you can buy one at a home or garden center.