



# Columbia Nursery

## Home Composting Guide for Gardeners

### Columbia Nursery – Northwest Montana

#### Why Compost?

Composting is one of the best ways to support your garden naturally. By recycling garden waste, kitchen scraps, and plant debris into compost, you create rich organic matter that improves soil health. Compost returns essential nutrients to the earth and enhances soil texture, helping plants thrive.

#### Choosing a Compost System

Your compost pile can be simple or more advanced depending on your garden size and preferences.

System	Advantages
Wire Bin	Easy to set up, movable, low cost
Wooden Slat Bin	Permanent, easy to access for turning compost
Three-Bin System	For active composters; allows easy rotation
Compost Tumblers	Speeds up composting with regular turning

#### What to Compost

##### Good Materials:

- Coffee grounds
- Eggshells
- Shrub trimmings (less than ¼” thick)
- Vegetable & fruit scraps
- Grass clippings (chemical-free)
- Pine needles (in moderation)
- Sawdust (untreated)
- Weeds (avoid noxious weeds)
- Plant debris
- Small wood chips

##### Avoid These:

- Stems thicker than ¼”
- Diseased or pest-laden plant material
- Chemically treated materials
- Meat scraps or grease
- Pet waste (cat or dog)



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## Building Your Compost Pile

### How to Layer:

- Start with a base layer: Use 5–7 inches of small twigs for airflow.
- Add a nitrogen layer: Fresh manure or grass clippings.
- Alternate layers: Mix in kitchen scraps and plant debris. Avoid too much of one material at once.

### Watering:

- Keep the pile moist but not soggy—like a wrung-out sponge.
- Water each new layer as you build it.
- In hot, dry weather, water the pile daily.
- During wet periods, use a tarp to control excess moisture.

### Turning the Pile:

- Turning moves material from the outside into the hot center, speeding up decomposition.
- Every 3 days in summer can produce compost in as little as 2 weeks.
- Once a month is fine for a slower approach.
- If using a wire bin, remove and reset the bin, then turn the pile into the new space.

## Seasonal Composting Tips

- Spring/Summer/Fall: Active composting season in Montana.
- Winter: Composting slows down, but you can continue to add material for spring activation.

## Using a Three-Bin System

- Bin 1: Start new compost
- Bin 2: Transfer material from Bin 1 after 1 week
- Bin 3: Transfer material from Bin 2 after another week (finished compost)

Repeat the cycle weekly or adjust timing based on temperature and composting speed.

## Why Compost?

- Reduce waste
- Enrich your soil
- Improve garden health
- Complete the natural growing cycle

## Need Help?

Visit Columbia Nursery for compost bins, tools, thermometers, and expert advice. We're here to help you get started or improve your composting system!