

Food Scrap Composting: Tips from the Pros

Composting has taken hold in Lake County. Today, 29 municipalities in the county offer curbside composting programs to their residents. That's remarkable progress considering there weren't any just 6 years ago.

Lake County municipalities that offer composting:

Avon Township, Bannockburn, Deer Park, Deerfield, Fox Lake, Grayslake, Gurnee, Hawthorn Woods, Highland Park, Highwood, Island Lake, Kildeer, Lake Barrington, Lake Bluff, Lake Zurich, Libertyville, Long Grove, Mundelein, North Barrington, Port Barrington, Riverwoods, Round Lake Beach, Round Lake, Shields Township, Third Lake, Tower Lakes, Vernon Hills, Volo, and Wauconda.

Curbside compost programs are popular because they're highly convenient for residents, allowing food and yard waste to be collected, together, in one container. The contents are then picked up and delivered to local composting facilities, instead of the landfill.

At the composting facilities, air, water, and techniques that speed up the natural process are employed to turn food and yard waste into compost. Compost is a rich, dark, naturally derived soil-additive, fondly called 'black gold'. Similar to how decomposing leaves enrich forest floors, compost is used to nourish deteriorated soils at local farms, parks, and home gardens - anywhere better soil is desired.

But you probably already know about the magic of compost, that's why you're here! So on with the tips. What follows is a collection of 'best of' tips from SWALCO staff and members with decades of composting experience.

Selecting a Container



- Designate a container for collecting food scraps in the kitchen. It doesn't need to be fancy, but it does need a lid.
- “Buy nothing” options: an empty coffee can (metal or plastic), quart-size deli container, any plastic container with lid, five-gallon lidded bucket.
- Widemouth containers are better for scraping off cutting boards, think rectangle or oval.
- If counter space is limited, there are bins that mount inside cabinet doors or attach inside existing trash and recycling bins. The fridge and freezer are also excellent locations for storing your container.
- Place a sheet of newspaper or a paper towel on the bottom of your container to keep food from sticking. You can also line your bin with a paper bag, or a BPI compostable liner. **Never use plastic bags.**



Collecting food scraps

- Review [these compost guidelines](#) so you know what's compostable. Remember no glass, plastic, or metal, not even little bit.
- Post [this cheat sheet](#) somewhere in the kitchen or on your food scrap bin.
- Keep your container nearby when preparing food and cleaning up after a meal.
- Used napkins and paper towels are great for scraping food off plates and into the bin.
- To reduce trips to the curbside compost container, store your scrap container in the freezer until you're ready to take it out.
- A light sprinkling of baking soda can reduce/absorb odors.
- In a pinch, a paper bag can be used to collect excess food scraps. Place the bag on a cutting board or piece of cardboard for support when transferring it to your curbside compost container. Both the paper bag and food scraps are compostable.



At the curb

Depending upon the municipality, you may be provided with a designated compost cart, or you may be able to use your own. **Please check with your Village, Township, or City for guidance.**

- Keep food scraps from sticking by layering food between yard waste, or use newspaper, a pizza box, or scrap paper as the bottom layer.
- A standard size paper lawn and leaf bag can be used as a liner for 32 to 35 gallon carts. Remember, no plastic bags, ever.
- Rinse out your cart as needed with a garden hose and a few drops of dish detergent.
- If wildlife is getting into your cart, secure the lid with a rock, brick, or bungee cord.

Did we miss a good one? Share your favorite food scraping tips with SWALCO, [by email](#) or on [facebook](#).

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