

Tumbler Composters

In general, tumbler composters are in the form of a barrel mounted on a stand so the unit can be turned or “tumbled” around a central axis. They can be mounted horizontally or vertically, both work well. Turning these units easily incorporates air into the material inside the tumbler, which can speed up the decomposition process. It is possible that you may get a finished product faster than with passive backyard composting due to the increased aeration that tumblers make possible. However, beware of manufacturers that say you will have finished compost in three weeks or less - anything that looks finished in this short amount of time will be unstable and need to sit for at least 6-8 weeks longer to cure..

Effort Scale:

| | | | | | | | |
|------|---|---|---|---|---|------|---|
| Easy | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Hard | Involves weekly maintenance and monitoring. Need another tumbler or system to use while first tumbler finishes. |
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Pros and Cons of Tumbler Composters

There are a number of things to consider when deciding whether or not to choose a tumbler composter over a standard backyard composter such as the Earth Machine.

Pros:

- Takes up less space and can be tidier than other systems due to being fully enclosed. They can therefore be a good fit for urban gardens where space is at a premium
- Keeping your pile aerated may be easier due to rotating mechanism as opposed to having to stir or flip a compost pile
- Great if you only need a small amount of compost or don't have lots of organic material to compost (i.e. small or no yard)
- More rodent resistant than composters that sit on the ground

Cons:

- More expensive than other composting systems (\$100-\$500)
- Larger models (over 9.5ft³ capacity) can be difficult to turn when full
- Tumblers divided into two compartments have a relatively small capacity, if you have a large yard you will likely need more than one or another composting system
- No contact with soil, prevents exchange of beneficial microorganisms and limits the biodiversity in your finished product
- Fruit fly populations can be greater than in backyard composters because all materials are mixed together instead of a layer of “browns” being left on top

Important to Note

Unless you are purchasing a tumbler that is divided into two compartments, you will need to purchase two tumblers or have another composting system set up to take your organic waste. This is because you need to stop adding fresh material to the tumbler once it has reached capacity so it can sit and finish decomposing. During this time, you will use your other system for your fresh organic waste.



<http://www.leevalley.com/en/garden/page.aspx?cat=2,33140&p=69083>



<http://learn.compostmania.com/blog/declare-your-freedom-from-food-waste/rotolock-compost-tumbler/>

What Goes in a Tumbler

Tumblers accept the same kinds of organic waste as standard backyard composters.

| Greens | Browns |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fruit and veggie scraps • Fresh grass clippings • Fresh weeds (no seeds) and plants • Coffee grounds and filters • Eggshells | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fallen leaves • Straw • Chipped woody debris • Shredded newspaper • Sawdust • Dry grass clippings |

Tips on How to Use a Tumbler

- Add equal amounts of greens and browns
- Maintain a moisture content similar to a wrung out sponge – add water if necessary
- When full, stop adding new material and allow to sit until all material has decomposed into a soil-like product, smells sweet and is dark brown (~6-8 weeks)
- Turn 3-4 times/week while adding fresh material and while letting material sit and finish
- When harvesting finished compost, sift out any larger pieces, toss them back in to the tumbler to decompose further in a fresh round
- Similar to regular backyard composting (see Fact Sheet #1), you don't need a "compost starter"
- 7.5ft³ models generally are large enough for a family of 4 with no yard, larger models are necessary for those with bigger gardens or more people in the household
- Doesn't need to be set in direct sunlight; if plastic then partial shade is best to avoid degradation from the heat of the sun
- Pay attention to how heavy the tumbler is getting, if it is too heavy to turn when totally full, then try just filling 2/3 full

Can cooked food go in a tumbler?

We generally recommend that cooked food be kept out of compost systems. However, because tumbler composters are particularly rodent resistant, you may choose to add small amounts of cooked food to them. Some tumblers claim to safely compost meat, but we recommend not including meat in your compost material, just to be on the safe side. We recommend the use of a food waste digester (see Fact Sheet #3) for diverting meat scraps and cooked food.



<http://www.windowbox.com/composting/back-porch-compost-tumbler.html>



1216 North Park St.
 Victoria, BC V8T 1C9
 250-386-9676
 info@compost.bc.ca
 www.compost.bc.ca
 Wednesday - Saturday
 10am-4pm

