

ASK THE EXPERTS: Composting in Apts. & Bear Country



Dear Dan,

I want to compost my kitchen food scraps, but I live in an apartment and only have a porch for outdoor space. A friend of mine lives in the mountains and is concerned about attracting bears with her backyard compost pile. Is there another composting option for us?

cut back on the amount of citrus, coffee grounds and other acidic foods in your bin. Or, build your own fruit fly trap (visit www.ecocycle.org/compost for directions).

Your worm bin is definitely a potential food source for animals like squirrels and, yes, even bears, if left outdoors. You'll have to judge for yourself the level of bear activity where you live. If bears aren't regular inhabitants of your neighborhood, you may be able to leave your bin outside undisturbed for much of the year and only bring it indoors in late summer and fall when bears are loading up on calories for hibernation. Squirrels are usually deterred by a good-fitting lid. Raccoons may be the most difficult to deter because they are so dexterous and persistent. If you see tooth marks on your bin or other evidence of a raccoon visit, bring your bin inside for a few weeks.

Q: How do I get started?

A: First, you need a bin. They are available online for anywhere from \$50 – \$200, BUT you can make your own bin for a fraction of the cost using an inexpensive plastic storage bin with a lid, like a 10-gallon Rubbermaid® Roughtote® storage box (see photo) using these guidelines:

- You want to match the size of the bin to the amount of food scraps you generate. A typical storage box is a good fit for a two-person household. Allow 3 square feet of surface area in your bin for every pound of food scraps you generate per day, and any bin should be at least 10" deep.



This 10-gallon Rubbermaid® Roughtote® is a great size vermicomposting bin, perfect for apartment dwellers or those living in bear country who need to keep their compost compact and contained.

- Worms require darkness, so you need a lid.
- Worms also need oxygen, so drill five holes on top and five holes in the bottom using a 1/4" drill bit for every square foot of feeding surface area inside.
- The holes on the bottom will also serve to drain excess moisture (make sure they are at the low point!), so you need something under the bin to catch the leachate. It can be another container of the same size and shape as the bin on top.
- Don't use treated wood or toxic finishes to build your bin.

Q: Where can I buy worms?

A: We recommend purchasing worms locally by heading up to Fort Collins to meet our local worm expert and Eco-Cycle® supplier, John Anderson (970-407-9076). A pound of worms (roughly 1,000 worms) is a good start for most households. You can also find several worm growers online if you search for "compost worms."

Q: I have all my supplies. What's the first step?

A: Have your bin ready before the worms arrive. Create a layer of bedding several inches thick using strips of moist newspaper. Mix in a small amount of soil or fin-

ished compost for the worms to ingest into their gizzards—they need this to digest their food. Then add a small amount of food scraps and watch them go to work!

Ask the Eco-Cycle® Experts by writing to recycle@ecocycle.org with the subject line "Ask the Experts."

Click it!

For more on composting in apartments or bear country, visit www.ecocycle.org/compost.

About Dan

Dan Matsch is Eco-Cycle's Compost and Organic Farming Expert. Before coming to Eco-Cycle®, he was an organic farmer for 13 years. He's also the brains behind our Microbe Brew Compost Tea.



DID YOU KNOW?

By composting your food scraps, you are cutting down on your greenhouse gas emissions! In a landfill, biodegradable materials break down without oxygen and produce methane, a greenhouse gas 72 times more dangerous in the short term than carbon dioxide.

Q: Won't the bin get smelly? And what about fruit flies? Will animals be attracted to my bin if it's out on the porch?

A: Your compost won't stink as long as it stays healthy (visit our website for more on that). A small population of fruit flies is inevitable, so the best way to minimize this issue is to keep your bin outside. If you want to keep it indoors, choose a place where you can tolerate a few flies. You can keep their population in check by avoiding overfeeding the worms, which limits the amount of rotting material available for the flies to lay their eggs. Fruit flies also prefer a slightly acidic environment, so if you have more flies than you can tolerate,

Made from worm castings, it's the best natural soil amendment on the planet!

grow more pest-resistant plants and lawns • retain water during hot summer months • replenish depleted soil

WHERE TO FIND IT
WEDNESDAYS: 4/7 - 8/18
 CHaRM, 9 am - 4 pm
SATURDAYS: 4/3 - 7/17
 Boulder Farmers' Market,
 8 am - 2 pm

BRING IN THIS COUPON AND GET 20% OFF!

Ask Rosie

She's back to answer all your recycling questions!

Dear Recycling Rosie,

What is the safest way to dispose of old prescription drugs and over-the-counter medications? You shouldn't flush them, right?



- Michelle

will end up going directly into lakes, rivers or oceans because municipal wastewater treatment plants are not designed to remove those chemicals and compounds.

So, flushing meds = bad. But getting these products out of your home to protect your family from accidental poisoning = good. Luckily for us in Boulder County, there are some great options to help avoid poisoning our families OR the environment. The best solution, of course, is to avoid wasting medications by buying only what you can use or need. If you are stuck with leftovers: 1. Ask your pharmacist if they will allow you to return unused medications, but be sure they use

proper disposal methods. 2. Participate in community programs that collect unwanted meds. For upcoming collection dates in Boulder County, visit www.bouldercountywater.org and click the "Rx Disposal" link in the left-hand menu. The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment also has a Colorado Medication Take-Back Pilot Project that provides secure collection boxes placed around the state. In Boulder County, there is a box at the King Soopers at 1650 30th St. in Boulder. Visit www.cdph.state.co.us/HM/medtakeback for more information. It's important to note that this collection box will NOT accept controlled substances (but the local collection events will). 3. If none of the above approaches is an option, you can safely dispose of meds at home using the following tips from the health department:

- Liquid medications should be poured over kitty litter or another absorbent material. Once the absorbent is dry, seal it in a plastic bag and place it in the trash.
- Pills should be kept in their original containers. Fill the container with

household glue, remove all personal information from the container, and place it in the trash once the glue has dried. The glue makes the pills unusable and deters people who look through the trash to find drugs for illicit use or "pharming."

- Medicated patches can be cut into small strips and either placed in a container with glue as described above, or mixed with an unpleasant substance like used coffee grounds or kitty litter.

NOTE: Medical sharps (needles) should also be handled with care. Please DO NOT toss them in the trash can and absolutely NOT in the recycling bin (we do get them, believe it or not). For information on how to safely handle sharps, please visit our A to Z Recycling Guide at www.ecocycle.org/htrg and scroll down to Sharps.

E-mail your recycling questions to Rosie at recycle@ecocycle.org with the subject line "Ask Rosie." If we print your letter, we'll send you a free Eco-Cycle® tote bag. Thanks for recycling!

- Rosie

Dear Michelle,

RIGHT. Don't flush pharmaceuticals. It used to be that those who wear white coats in their profession would tell patients it was fine to toss unused or expired medications down the toilet or drain, but happily most now understand this is a VERY bad idea. No matter whether the medication is liquid or solid, any pharmaceuticals, over-the-counter meds or personal care products sent down your pipes to domestic sewage systems