The can composter (figure 1) is a great way to make small batches of compost when you don’t have space for a larger bin.

Cost: Less than $30

Capacity: About one 30-gallon bag of yard materials and kitchen scraps

Degree of difficulty: ✪ Little or no building skills needed

How to construct

MATERIALS
- 30- to 50-gallon trashcan with cover (metal or plastic will work, but plastic will last longer)
- Food waste or green garden materials (see table 1)
- Shredded paper, leaves, or other dried plant material (see table 1)
- Coarse, untreated sawdust, straw, or wood chips
- Bricks or cement blocks (optional)
- Power drill
- Pitchfork, shovel, or compost turner
- Work gloves

CONSTRUCTION DETAILS

1. Drill three rows of holes ½ to 1” in size 4 to 6” apart around the sides of the can. Then drill several holes in the lid and the bottom of the trashcan. These holes will allow the air to move and excess moisture to drain.

2. (Optional.) Place the can on cement blocks or bricks to increase air circulation.

3. Place 2 to 3” of sawdust, straw, or wood chips in the bottom of the can to absorb excess moisture and improve drainage. Layer one part green (nitrogen) materials with two parts brown (carbon) materials to fill the can. Make sure your brown materials include leaves or paper, as the carbon in wood chips or sawdust is not readily available to compost microbes. End with a top layer of brown materials to control odors and pests.

FIGURE 1. Can composter
The finished compost will be ready in 6 to 12 months (sooner if the materials are mixed regularly and kept damp).

Now you are ready to set your bin out in your yard and begin composting! Simply mix one part green (nitrogen) materials with two parts brown (carbon) materials (Table 1), keep the materials as damp as a wrung-out sponge, and use a small shovel, pitchfork, or garden fork to mix the contents from time to time.

**TABLE 1. Materials for composting**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brown materials (2 parts)</th>
<th>Green materials (1 part)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dry leaves</td>
<td>Green leaves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twigs less than ¼” in diameter</td>
<td>Grass clippings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shredded newspaper</td>
<td>Weeds (before they have gone to seed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shredded household cardboard: egg cartons, paper towel, and toilet paper rolls</td>
<td>Leftover plants at the end of the season</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coffee grounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fruit and vegetable scraps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Eggshells</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Resources**

For more information on composting, including the Wisconsin Master Composter Program, contact:

**Solid & Hazardous Waste Education Center (SHWEC)**
[www.uwex.edu/ces/shwec](http://www.uwex.edu/ces/shwec)
Joe Van Rossum, Recycling Specialist
joseph.vanrossum@ces.uwex.edu
608-262-0385

**Composting to Reduce the Waste Stream (NRAES-43)**
Plants and Life Sciences Publishing (PALS), Cornell Cooperative Extension
[http://palspublishing.cals.cornell.edu/nra_order.taf?_function=detail&pr_booknum=nraes-43](http://palspublishing.cals.cornell.edu/nra_order.taf?_function=detail&pr_booknum=nraes-43)

**Master Composter Resource Manual**
Cornell Waste Management Institute
[cwmi.css.cornell.edu/mastercompostermanual.pdf](http://cwmi.css.cornell.edu/mastercompostermanual.pdf)

These publications are available from the Learning Store (learningstore.uwex.edu):
- Compost (A4021)
- Do-It-Yourself Compost Bins series
  - Barrel Composter (G4020-01)
  - Can Composter (G4020-02)
  - Concrete Block Composter (G4020-03)
  - Wire Mesh Composter (G4020-04)
  - Wood and Wire Composter (G4020-05)
  - Wood Pallet Composter (G4020-06)
  - Wood 3-Bin Composter (G4020-07)

**Do not compost:** Meat, bones, grease, whole eggs, dairy products, diseased or highly invasive plants, pet waste.