

Home Composting Tips for the Coming Winter



If you are composting at home already, odds are you've noticed your food scraps freezing in the winter. As any compost doctor will tell you, "this is completely normal."

Home composting is also sometimes called 'cold composting' and partially that is due to our cold New England weather.

It is also due to the relatively small size of our home composting piles (usually under 3-cubic feet) and the fact that most of us don't pay a lot of attention to compost recipe – mixing 3 parts browns (carbon-based things like clean saw dust, dry grass/plants/straw, dry leaves, paper) to 1 part greens (food scraps, manures, fresh plants/grass clippings).

Even if we do focus on recipe, come January 20th most of us will find our leftovers frozen solid. Again, "this IS completely normal." A 3-cubic foot pile of organic material simply does not have the mass to heat up and compost well in freezing temperatures. Large, commercial-scale composters are often building piles as large as 8 feet high, 12 feet wide and 30 or more feet long. These piles routinely reach an internal temperature of 140 degrees or more – melting even a foot of snow.

Our advice? Get ready to empty your current compost bins this Halloween.

The end of October is cold in Vermont, so cold you've already begun to notice your home composting bin slowing down. Emptying your compost bin each fall ensures that you have ample room for all of winter's food scraps. Remember how much food you made last holiday season?

Another suggestion is to have two bins for your home compost; using them in seasonal, 6-month rotations: Nov. through April and May through Oct. This ensures that your compost has sat for 6-months of additional curing and composting before you use it.

In 2020 food scraps are banned from disposal in the trash as required by Vermont's Universal Recycling law. Throwing food scraps in the trash, which is then landfilled, releases significant greenhouse gas emissions. Home composting is a great option and a great way to sustainably manage your food scraps.