



## Fact sheet 5

### Composting at home



Dead aquatic plants

In 2002, the province of Québec generated over 10 million tons of residual matter. Divided among 7.5 million inhabitants, this figure corresponds to more than 1 TON of garbage PER PERSON, per year. In 1998, the provincial government introduced the *Québec Residual Materials Management Policy*, which aims at recovering 65% of the residual matter by 2008. This goal can only be attained by participation of all sectors of society. Additionally, lakeside residents must deal with the accumulation of dead aquatic plants (they are not algae) which eventually degrade and let go of phosphorus in the water.

## Is there a problem ?

### What is composting?

Composting is a means of recovery of residual matter that combines organic refuse, which, when given the time, decomposes in humid soil humus: compost. This process requires a few months to produce a fertile soil. Only putrescible substances may be used. However, these substances account for approximately 41% of what we throw out! A mature compost is dark brown. We use it to improve the quality of the ground. You can spread it in the garden, on your lawn etc. Used at home, composting reduces by 1/3 the amount of domestic garbage.

### Aquatic composting

For lakeside residents, aquatic composting may also be an interesting alternative. Add your dead aquatic plants to your compost and take part in the widespread effort to reduce phosphorus in the Missisquoi Bay. In fact, aquatic plants retain some of the phosphorus contained in

the water. By ecologically disposing of these plants, you help Lake Champlain rid itself of its main problem: excess phosphorus. Use a pitchfork with six teeth for better handling. It is of prime importance that you dry the plants before you mix them in the compost or else it could smell. Spread your compost in your garden, on your lawn or mix it with soil to enrich it and produce better soil yield.

### How to build your compost bin?

First of all, the base of your bin should occupy a minimal area of 1m<sup>2</sup> (1m x 1m) otherwise, it will not produce enough heat to thoroughly decompose the matter. The sidings should be made out of wood with fencing to air out the pile. A rain cover is optional. Preferably, the base of the bin sits directly on the ground, but it can also be made out of wood or stones. To avoid a smell of rot, do not place the box in an area that does not drain well. It is also possible to buy a compost bin or to build one using pierced plastic.

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Beautiful compost bin



## There are solutions !

### Vermicomposting

Add some worms: vermicomposting uses a special type of worm, the Redworm (or Red Wiggler), that digests the soil and organic refuse. Each worm eats the equivalent of its own weight per day in order to produce a nutrient-rich waste. You can leave these garbage eaters outside during the winter as long as the compost bin is well isolated and covered with bags of dead leaves. Since they reproduce themselves quickly, you will be able to offer the little ones to your friends, and thus spread the vermicomposting technique!

### Let's change our habits

To include in the compost	To avoid in the compost
All vegetable and fruit refuse, bread, teabags, eggshells, coffee grounds, small branches, earth, straw, cut grass, dry aquatic plants, leaves, rice, pasta	Any leftover fish, meat, dairy product, ash (except wooden), bone, weeds or animal waste.

### How to produce nice compost?

It is recommended to alternate layers as follows: 1/3 domestic garbage, 1/3 garden leftovers and 1/3 soil. Rich in nutrients, this combination will enrich the soil in your garden or lawn! A good idea is to add a bit of grass and leaves (20 cm layers maximum) to balance the compost in nitrogen and carbon. The addition of manure is also recommended. It is important to mix the pile of compost regularly. This way, the biodegradation will be accelerated and the compost will be more uniformly produced. Mixing the pile makes it air out, which in turn results in nicer compost. If the compost lets go of a smell of ammonia, add carbon (leaves, straw) and air out the pile.

### Useful references

Nature-action Québec  
(450) 441-3899  
[www.nature-action.qc.ca](http://www.nature-action.qc.ca)

Recyc-Québec  
(514) 351-7835  
1-800-807-0678  
[www.recyc-quebec.gouv.qc.ca](http://www.recyc-quebec.gouv.qc.ca)

### Where to buy Redworms :

La Ferme Pousse-Menu  
Montréal  
514-486-2345

### Documentations :

*Le compostage facilité: guide sur le compostage domestique*  
NOVA Envirocom  
[www.novaenvirocom.ca](http://www.novaenvirocom.ca)

*Comment faire du compost chez soi*  
Publication du Québec

Follow the steps of the BVBMC. In 2003, the newly-launched aquatic composting project was a great success. This year, with the help of volunteers in the area, the experience will be renewed.  
**Participez!**

This research was conducted by Catherine Hogan and Stéphanie Blais.

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This fact sheet was designed in collaboration with the Ministère du Développement durable, de l'Environnement et des Parcs.

