

Winter Composting: How to compost in our cold and snowy winter



1. Keep turning: continue to use your wing-digger to aerate your compost for as long as you can, i.e. until you can no longer get your tool in there to mix it. Give it a good soaking of water before things really start to freeze. If you can, add a layer of snow (2 cm) from time to time so that when it thaws there is some moisture built in.

2. Plan for browns: collect fallen leaves and put them in a dry, convenient location. I stash them in a plastic bag under a balcony near my composter. Even if they get wet they will be fine to use.

3. Plan for collection space: harvesting finished compost in the fall will help ensure there is enough room to continue to add your waste through the winter. But if you do run out of room in your composter you can collect kitchen scraps in a container outside where they will freeze. You could use your yard waste container that you won't be using in the winter, but that could get very heavy. Five gallon pails are probably a better option. You may want to line the bin with a plastic bag if you are squeamish about cleaning out the remnants in the spring. Make sure your composter or your alternate storage bin is located in a place you will be able to reach when the snow flies in earnest.

4. Add as usual: if there is room in your composter, continue to add your kitchen scraps and browns. Keep layering, and remember to add twice the amount of browns as greens. If I have time I sometimes add a thin layer of snow to build in some moisture in the spring.

As the temperature falls, microbial activity decreases but it will start up again when the weather warms up. Freezing and thawing will actually help break down the organics.

In the spring give the pile a thorough turning and add a shovel full of dirt to reactivate the pile. If you collected your kitchen scraps in another container you can add them then, but make sure you add sufficient browns at that time too. Layer or be sure to mix well.