

In the dirt: **Sheet Compost**

Size: Our test area was 1 meter², but sheet compost can be used in any size of garden bed.

Maximum capacity: Layers can be piled from 20-100 cm high over as large a space as desired.

Price: free

Tester satisfaction: high

What you can put in it: Kitchen scraps (excluding meat, bones, dairy, and fats), leaves, grass clippings, other yard waste (excluding cat or dog waste).

“Yuck” factor: Low. Assembled layers do not have to be disturbed and can be covered by vegetation.

Complexity to use: Low. Layers are assembled and left, or planted on.

In winter: Breakdown stops, but materials can still be added in layers as they are available.

Mobility: The system cannot be moved.



Tested by: **The Saskatoon Food Bank Garden Patch**

The Garden Patch is a large community garden run by the Saskatoon Food Bank and Learning Centre, and tended by a huge team of volunteers. They have an enormous amount of garden waste, and enjoy trying different compost methods with it. The community garden is active from the beginning of May to the end of September.

Results:

Testing period: May 2014—May 2015

Inputs:

- 98 litres of organic waste (90% greens, 10% browns, 0% dirt or finished compost, 0% other)
- Watering and aerating unnecessary

Outputs:

- Finished compost is in-place and not measurable.

Recommendations:

Sheet compost is a great, free way for community gardens or households with gardens use up a large amount of compostable materials without sacrificing growing space. Layers of greens and browns are assembled directly on the soil. The final layer should be browns. Compost-loving plants, such as squash or beans, can be grown on top in a small amount of dirt. These plants will benefit from the nutrients and microbial activity of the compost. The Garden Patch planted squash in their sheet compost, which grew large and lush and proved more resistant to powdery mildew than the squash grown directly in soil. The sheet compost also retains moisture better than plain soil.

Sheet compost is generally meant to be assembled all at once, although more layers can be added as long as nothing has been planted on top. In the following spring, compost from the area can be raked outwards to cover more ground if desired. Partially-decomposed piles can be added to and planted in again.

Bonus tip: Grow Piles

In addition to their sheet compost, the Garden Patch also experimented with two 'grow piles,' in 2014. Grow piles are very similar to sheet compost, but generally built thicker and higher. (The Garden Patch's sheet compost was 30 cm thick, while a grow pile is typically 100 cm.) A length of PVC pipe with holes drilled in it is laid horizontally through the lower third of the pile for aeration. Squash planted in these grow piles grew even more enthusiastically than those in the regular sheet compost.