

In the dirt: **Trench Compost**

Size: 30—50 cm deep, no maximum width or length.

Maximum capacity: As the trench is filled, room must be left to cover organic waste with 10—20 cm of soil.

Price: free

Tester satisfaction: high

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

“Yuck” factor: Low. Materials are buried as they are added and decompose under the soil.

Complexity to use: Low. Materials are buried and left.

In winter: Additional trench cannot be dug, but pre-dug trenches can still be added to. Cover with set-aside loose soil if possible.

Mobility: The system cannot be moved.

Recommendations:

Trench compost is a great, cost-free way for community gardens or households with garden space to process food waste and green plant material. Unlike traditional composting, it is not necessary to add dry brown materials such as leaves or woodchips to balance the wet greens. For this reason trench composting is a particular good solution for those without an easy source of browns. (If both browns and greens need to be processed, we recommend pairing trench composting with mulching.)

Plants growing next to a trench compost will benefit from the nutrients, moisture retention, and increased microbial activity. The Garden Patch planted winter squash and tomatoes next to their trench. These plants did very well over the summer and showed slightly increased resistance to powdery mildew.

After several months, or in the following spring



Example of filled trench compost before burying. Not from our test.

season, seeds and seedlings can be planted directly into the old trench. Over time, trench composting will make garden soil richer and easier to till.

Trench composts require a small amount of forward planning in late fall, when enough trench should be dug to accommodate food waste during the winter. The loose dirt can be saved for covering scraps.



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 every year, 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:

- 340 litres of organic waste (100% greens)
- Watering and aerating unnecessary

Outputs:

- Finished compost is in-place and not measurable.