

January 2023

Book Two

# Gardening with the Elementals and Faery Folk

## Book Two: Composting Basics

—

By Jennifer Jones



*Example of a 3-compartment compost system*

In Book One we discussed how to get to know the Elementals and Fairies in your region, specifically in your yard. In this book, we will get down to the basics of composting and get you prepped for Book Three Gardening Basics. Let's get you out there in the soil and in the garden with the Elements and Elementals as soon as possible. Not only is composting an excellent way to reduce your waste and create nutrient-rich soil for your garden but it is the very activity that is the shortest path to getting to know the Elementals and Fairy Folk in your region.

Take the steps from Book One and apply these when going out to your yard, be sure to have already observed your yard as indicated in book one as well, once you have applied the steps in book one, here are some basics for getting started composting in your yard or apartment.

## **Creating a 3-compartment Compost System**

Creating a 3 compartment compost system is a great idea! You can start by finding a spot in your yard that gets plenty of sun and has good drainage. You'll need three bins or containers that are large enough to hold a good amount of material. The first bin should be filled with brown material like dead leaves, twigs, and hay. The second bin should be filled with green material like grass clippings, vegetable scraps, and fruit peels. The third bin should be used as a finished compost bin, where you can store the compost that you've made.

You will use the Brown mix to add to top of the Green Mix to ensure you do not have an issue with insects and pests. When you mix the brown and green materials in the first two bins, make sure to mix them in a ratio of 3 parts brown material to 1 part green material. You can use a pitchfork, shovel, or rake to mix everything together, and then add a layer of soil to the top. Make sure to keep your compost moist, and turn it every few weeks to ensure that it breaks down properly. With a bit of patience and care, you should have a great compost system in no time!

## **Active Compost Pile**

This method is for yards only, you would not be able to do this in an apartment unless you have a community space available.

1. Start with a 3-4 foot square area and make sure your compost pile is in a well-draining, sunny spot in your garden.
2. Add a mix of green and brown materials to your pile. Examples of green materials include grass clippings, vegetable and fruit scraps, and coffee grounds. Examples of brown materials include leaves, straw, and wood chips.
3. Keep your compost pile moist but not soggy. Water it regularly, but don't over-saturate it.
4. Mix your compost pile regularly to aerate it and help it break down faster.
5. Monitor the temperature of your compost pile and make sure it stays between 120-160 degrees Fahrenheit.

6. Add compost activators such as, shredded cardboard, kelp meal or rock dust to speed up the decomposition process.
7. Be patient – it can take anywhere from a few months to a year for your compost pile to fully break down.

Following these steps should help you create nutrient-rich soil for your garden, and leave you with more time to connect with the Faeries and Elementals

## **Troubleshooting issues with your compost pile**

With all things there is a learning curve as you create your compost post, here are some best practices and troubleshooting techniques. Make sure you are maintaining the right ratio of carbon-rich “brown” materials, like leaves and sawdust, and nitrogen-rich “green” materials, like grass clippings and food scraps. This should be 2 parts “brown” to 1 part “green”. You should also ensure that your compost pile is getting enough air, water, and heat. To do this, turn your compost pile every week or two, mix in water as needed, and be aware of the temperature. A pile that is too cold won’t decompose, and a pile that is too hot will kill off the beneficial microorganisms at work. If you follow these tips, your compost pile should be working correctly in no time!

## **Compost Tumblers**

Another way to compost is to use compost tumblers. They are easy to use and can help to speed up the composting process. They are a great alternative to traditional composting methods, as they are enclosed, so you don’t have to worry about animals getting into your compost pile. You can also control the temperature and moisture levels of the compost better. If you have a small backyard, you can even purchase a smaller compost tumbler to fit your space. Under ideal conditions, you can convert waste to finished home compost in as little as three weeks in a sealed compost tumbler.



# Benefits of tumbler compost vs an active compost pile

The biggest benefit of using a tumbler compost bin versus an active pile is that it is much more efficient and less labor-intensive. You could do use one of these on a ground-level apartment or a large balcony area if set up just right. With a tumbler, you can simply turn the bin every few days and the mixing of the compost materials will be done for you. This leads to a more even decomposition of the organic materials, which in turn leads to faster composting. Additionally, a tumbler compost bin can be more aesthetically pleasing in your yard and helps to contain odors and pests. An active pile will require more effort to mix and turn the compost materials manually, which can be a bit of an inconvenience. Additionally, pests are not as attracted to this enclosed bin.

## Vermicomposting

Vermicomposting should be done in addition to composting as vermicomposting aka worm composting is a magical way to turn food waste into nutrient-rich fertilizer for your garden! It's done by using worms to break down organic matter like kitchen scraps, coffee grounds, and paper into a nutrient-rich fertilizer. The worms that are commonly used for vermicomposting are either Red Wigglers or European Nightcrawlers. Both are hermaphrodites, meaning that each worm is capable of producing eggs and reproducing on its own. Vermicomposting is a great way to reduce the amount of organic waste going to landfills while providing your garden with a natural fertilizer. Here are the steps to get you started with your Worm Composting Bin.

1. Gather materials: You will need a container with a tight-fitting lid, such as a plastic storage bin, some bedding material like shredded newspaper, leaves, or straw, and a few pounds of worms (red wiggler or *Eisenia fetida*).
2. Prepare the bin: Drill about 50 to 100 holes the size of a pea in the bottom of a rubbermaid bin, towards the bottom and about 10 to 25 holes in the bottom.
3. Place the dry materials such as shredded newspaper, cardboard, dried leaves, sawdust, and wood shavings in the bin. Make sure to avoid using materials that have been treated or have chemicals, like glossy paper or colored/dyed paper. Additionally, you can add dry grass clippings and straw, but it's important to make sure they are completely dry before adding them.

4. You can also add small amounts of soil or clay to the mix, as this will help provide essential minerals and nutrients to the compost and moisten it with water.
5. Add the worms to the bedding, and make sure the lid is on tightly.
6. Feed the worms: Add food scraps to the bin, making sure to mix them into the bedding material.
7. Monitor the bin: Check the bin every few weeks to make sure the bedding is still moist, the temperature is within the ideal range, and the worms are reproducing.
8. Harvest the compost: Once the bin is full of finished compost, you can either harvest the compost from the top layer or dump the entire bin and start a new one.



## **Egg shells help worms procreate**

It's true that egg shells can be beneficial for worms in the soil! Egg shells are a natural source of calcium, which is important for helping worms reproduce and maintain healthy bodies. Egg shells also provide beneficial nutrients, like phosphorus and magnesium, which help soil microbes and worms flourish. In addition, egg shells help to aerate the soil, making it easier for roots to spread and helping to improve drainage. So, if you're looking to give worms a helping hand, adding egg shells to your soil is a great way to do it!

If you need help with building your worm bin, this author provides consultative services to help you get started today. I can walk you through the very easy process, all you need is a drill and 2 rubbermaid bins. We will get you up in running in less than a half hour.



## **How to Keep Pests and Rodents out of all types of Compost**

Keeping pests and rodents out of your compost is a great way to ensure your compost is healthy and safe to use. Here are some tips to help you keep pests and rodents away from your compost:

1. Keep your compost covered. This will help keep rodents from having easy access to your compost.
2. Monitor your compost regularly. Check for any signs of pests or rodents, such as droppings or holes in the compost.
3. Make sure your compost is not too moist. Rodents are attracted to moist compost, so make sure you are not over-watering your compost.

4. Ensure the compost is turned regularly. This will help to discourage any pests or rodents from making a home in the compost.
5. If you are using a bin to store your compost, make sure it is kept clean and tidy.
6. Add some predators to your compost, such as birds or hedgehogs. These animals can help to keep away any pests or rodents.
7. Place some plants around your compost that rodents don't like, such as lavender, rosemary or mint.

By following these tips, you can help to keep pests and rodents away from your compost and ensure that your compost is safe and healthy to use.

## Summary of Composting Basics

1. Choose a compost bin or container and make sure it's in a convenient location.
2. Research the best composting materials to use in your area.
3. Layer your compostable materials in the container.
4. Turn your compost regularly to ensure even decomposition.
5. Add water and stir the compost to help it break down.
6. Monitor the temperature of your compost and add more materials as needed.
7. Add carbon-rich materials to balance the compost as needed.
8. Be sure **not** to add meat, dairy, or eggs to your compost pile.
9. Harvest your finished compost and use it in your garden or landscaping.

I hope this helps you get started on your composting journey! Good luck and contact me for a compost session if you are interested in learning more.