

Constructing a Snow-Fence Compost Bin

A snow-fence composting unit is quite simple to construct. The structure works best when four posts are pounded into the ground at the corners to provide support.

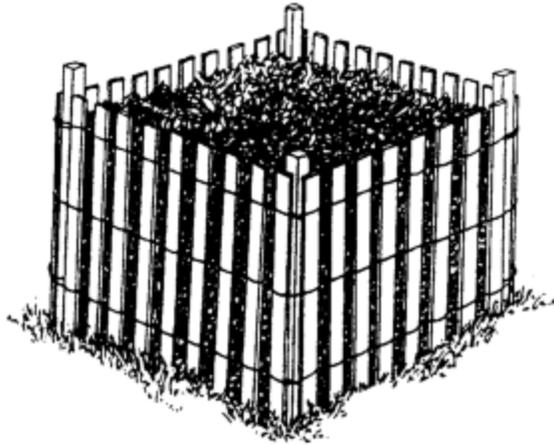


Figure 1 - Snow-Fence Compost Bin

Materials

- Four wooden* or metal posts, 4-5 feet long
- Heavy wire for ties
- 13-foot length of snow fencing* at least 3 feet tall

Tools

- Heavy-duty wire or tin snips
- Pliers
- Sledge hammer
- Work gloves

Building a Compost Bin Using Snow-Fence

1. Choose a 3-foot-square site for your unit, and pound the four posts into the ground 3 feet apart, at the corners of the square.
2. Cut the heavy wire into lengths for ties. Attach the snow fence to the outside of the posts with the wire ties, using pliers.
3. Attach the ends of the snow fence together in the same way, forming a 3-foot-square enclosure.



Composting Basics

1. Be sure that your compost pile receives a balanced diet. You will need to include materials that are high in carbon as well as materials that are high in nitrogen. High carbon materials include paper, sawdust, wood chips, straw and leaves. High nitrogen materials include food scraps, grass clippings, and manure. Nitrogen fertilizer may also be added if necessary.
2. Maintain proper particle size. Items like leaves, limbs and newspaper work best if shredded or chopped into 1/4 inch pieces. Food scraps should also be cut into small-sized particles.
3. Make sure that your compost receives a proper amount of air. Turning or mixing every week or so will help insure proper air flow.
4. Check the moisture level in the compost. Performing the "squeeze test" will tell you if the moisture level is correct. Compost should be damp to touch, but drops should not come out when you squeeze it. Add dry straw or sawdust if too damp and add water if too dry.
5. Monitor the temperature of the compost. Temperatures between 90° and 140°F are ideal. Compost bins at 3 feet x 3 feet x 3 feet size maintain temperature better.

*Regarding use of wood products in gardening and composting projects: The University of Minnesota conducted a study on a raised bed garden made from Chromated Copper Arsenate (CCA) *pressure-treated* wood. Results showed that the vegetables grown can accumulate arsenic from the CCA pressure-treated wood, however, based on U.S. Public Health Standards, these vegetables would be safe for human consumption. Alternative building materials are currently available. This information is provided so that consumers are aware of the potential issues related to treated wood. If using scrap lumber or other used materials make sure you know if the lumber/materials are treated and what they have been used for in the past. Consumers should use their own judgment when constructing garden or compost units. For more information on wood products contact the University of Kentucky Forestry Department at 859-257-7597 or foresty.extension@uky.edu.

Adapted with permission from *Composting to Reduce the Waste Stream*, published by NRAES, Cooperative Extension, 152 Riley-Robb Hall, Ithaca, New York 14853-5701. (607)255-7654. Adapted for use in Kentucky by Kim Henken and Jenny Cocanougher, Extension Associates for Environmental and Natural Resource Issues with the University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service.

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