

JACK-O-LANTERN COMPOST

Composting is an easy way to help the earth and minimize food and paper waste, and there's no better time to start your own at-home composting bin than right now! With Halloween comes pumpkins – whole pumpkins for decoration, pumpkins cut into jack-o-lanterns, pumpkins used to make delicious treats, and more – and those pumpkins can be the perfect starter for your composting bin. So let's get to it; there's nothing spooky about saving the environment!

Supplies

- A plastic bin with a lid that fits wherever you plan on storing it – if your compost will be outside, bigger bins will work, if inside adjust accordingly
- A drill, handled by an adult
- Dry leaves or shredded paper
- Dirt
- Pumpkins, jack-o-lantern scraps, or any other natural waste you want to compost



Instructions

1. Once you've chosen your plastic bin and lid, have an adult drill 8-10 small holes each in the bottom of the bin and the top of the lid for proper aeration.
2. Fill the bin about a quarter of the way with dry leaves or shredded paper.
3. On top of that layer, add dirt until the bin is about halfway full.
4. Now it's time for the fun part: adding your jack-o-lantern scraps! Toss your compost-friendly waste into your bin, on top of the dirt, and break up any big pieces to help speed up the composting process. You can compost things like eggshells, coffee grinds, plant clippings, and other food waste as well as things like cardboard and newspaper; but be careful to keep dairy products, meat, grease, and pet waste out of your composting mix – the EPA has a full list of composting no-nos if you're ever unsure.
5. Stir your mix to cover your scraps. You can use a shovel, stick, or your own two hands!
6. Moisten your pile with water, but be sure not to get it soaked as that can cause yucky smells. Try using a spray bottle if you have one, or poke a hole in the cap of a water bottle and spray it on that way!
7. Put your bin in your chosen storage area. If you're composting inside, be sure to keep a tray or other protective layer under your bin to catch any dirt that might fall out and keep your home squeaky clean!
8. Repeat steps 4-7 every time you have something new to compost, and in 2-3 months you'll have fresh and fertile soil that can be used for gardening (or just returned to the earth and put back outside).

How the Science Works

Composting works by creating the perfect environment for soil-dwelling microorganisms to eat your compostables and break them back down into soil, which becomes super nutrient rich and fertile through the process. Much like us, these microorganisms need food (your compostable natural waste), water (this is why we make sure our compost mixture stays moist), and air (provided by the holes in the bin as well as by turning the mixture) to survive and thrive. Compost away!

ZERO-WASTE PUMPKIN SEED SNACK

Finished carving your jack-o-lantern, and not sure what to do with those spare pumpkin guts? Though you can compost most of your scraps, seeds should be kept out of the bin. But fear not: you can make a delicious and healthy zero-waste salted toasted pumpkin seed snack with them instead!

Ingredients

- Spare pumpkin seeds from your jack-o-lantern
- Salt
- Olive oil
- Optional: your favorite spices (think curry powder or paprika, or go the sweet and salty route with cinnamon and sugar or a pumpkin spice blend)

Supplies

- A large bowl
- Cold water
- Measuring cups
- A baking sheet
- Parchment paper
- An oven (preheated to 400°F)



Instructions

1. Be sure all of the seeds are scooped out of your jack-o-lantern. Don't worry if they're stuck to some stringy orange pumpkin innards.
2. Fill a bowl with cold water, and put the mass of pumpkin guts and seeds into it. Swish them around or put them under running water, and the seeds will separate from the pumpkin matter and float to the top. Scoop the seeds out, and throw the rest into your composting bin!
3. To be sure your seeds are salted and cooked properly, you'll need to see how much you have using measuring cups. Measure your seeds, and use 2 cups of water and 1 tablespoon of salt for every half cup of pumpkin seeds you have. If you want saltier pumpkin seeds, you can add a bit more salt, but be careful not to overdo it! You can always sprinkle more salt on top later.
4. Pour the appropriate amount of water and salt into a pot, and have an adult help you bring it to a boil. Pour the seeds in, and let simmer for 5-10 minutes. This process will both clean and season the seeds!
5. Drain the water from the seeds, and dry them as best you can. The dryer they are, the better they'll roast!
6. It's time to get cooking! Have an adult help you preheat your oven to 400°F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper, and spread your seeds onto it. Drizzle olive oil on top and add any desired spices, and toss the seeds around until they're evenly coated.
7. Once your oven finishes preheating, put your baking sheet of seeds in to cook! Bake until the seeds begin to brown, which could be 5-20 minutes depending on the size of the seeds. Feel free to safely stir the seeds around once or twice to be sure they cook evenly!
8. Once your seeds are lightly browned, remove them from the oven and let cool. Once your seeds have finished cooling, they're ready to eat! Have them plain, add them to trail mix, or use them as a crunchy topping for other dishes such as muffins, soup, or pasta. Enjoy your zero-waste Halloween treat!