

# THE DARKWOODS GUIDE TO COMPOSTING

Supporting the planet

Certified

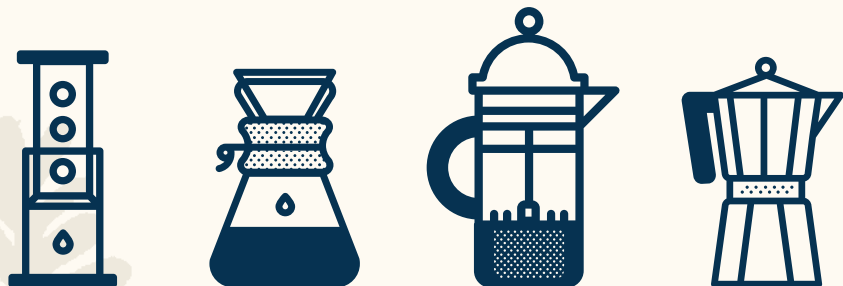


Corporation<sup>®</sup>

## What Is Composting?

Composting is a natural process that decomposes organic waste using nitrogen, carbon, moisture, and oxygen. This process turns the organic waste into a dark, rich substance that is known as humus or compost. Humus can be used on all kinds of soils to provide the proper nutrients for plants and help them grow quickly.

Composting is basically about speeding up, and containing, the natural process of how food and organic matter breaks down. It is a circular practice and can be done at a small scale; it all makes a difference. Composting reduces waste and produces a valuable output.



**“Cafés, restaurants and coffee shops are, increasingly, looking at ways to reduce and manage their food waste.”**



Many will pay for food waste collections, adding cost to the business. Food waste also negatively affects the environment due to the amount of methane it produces when disposed into landfill.

There are several ways that hospitality businesses can continue to reduce the volume of food waste they produce; but, what’s left, still need to be disposed of. Some businesses are now embracing composting, as an alternative to throwing food waste into the bin.

This guide is informed by practical experiences, both at Dark Woods, and from hospitality businesses we worked with on a pilot project called Conscious Composting. 9 businesses volunteered to compost on-site, in most cases using a simple and inexpensive tumbler composter.

They also recorded their experiences and how they learned and are learning the practice of composting.

---

Reference:  
**Morland L and Lever J (2023)**  
Turn the handle everyday: taking climate action through Conscious Composting.

## Why should you compost at your café? There are benefits to composting food waste:

1. You will get great, rich compost for your plants, herb pots or hanging baskets. Or you can give the compost away to your customers.



2. It provides a focus for how you manage and reduce your food waste – you will start to notice what you are throwing away, what ingredients you waste, what plate scraps are coming back

3. It can reduce your costs – many food businesses pay for food waste collections. Anything that reduces how much goes in the bin, can save you money. You will need to buy a composter bin or tumbler but, once you have this, it's free – just your time and effort.

4. It can help you to engage with your customers, demonstrate your sustainability credentials and increase visibility of your business.



5. It will reduce your greenhouse gas emissions. Food waste in landfill, rots and produces methane, which is a major contributor to climate change.

6. It may lead to more sustainable practices. Raising your awareness of food waste can help you identify other areas of the business that could be developed to support a net-zero approach...



## Lodge Café

**An independent community-café based in the renovated gate house at the entrance to Bowling Park in Bradford. Laurence and the team at Lodge focus on sustainability, so jumped at the chance to participate in our composting pilot. We asked Laurence to reflect on their experience of the project:**

### **Before joining the project, what was your approach to waste and composting?**

Before this project we had little experience of composting. We had experimented with using spent coffee grounds as garden fertiliser over the past summer (2022). We also provided “compostable” packaging with all our takeout items. On the odd occasion we’ve heard back from customers who have attempted to compost these items at home.

### **What was your main goal, when deciding to take part in the pilot?**

Our goal for this project was to reduce the number of leftovers, spent food and produce that gets thrown into general waste. Then to create compost that we can either use to fertilise our plants or plant new items into our garden. We thought it would be nice to provide compost for our local allotments. Our big aim was to incorporate a composting process into staff routine that didn’t over impact our workflows. We were curious to see how composting will fit into our working week. We hoped that, over time, this system would be beneficial to our business by reducing our general waste.

### **What were the main challenges you faced?**

We struggled to implement this process into our shifts as we don’t have the time around our normal roles to compost! We’ve found that is an activity that has had to be implemented around our normal working hours. However, the results from a little extra time put into each week have been worth it for us.

### **What did you learn from being part of the pilot?**

The compost we have made so far has been used to fill all our hanging baskets and planters this spring. We used a combination of composted food waste, spent coffee and last year’s soil from our baskets and planters. Everything we’ve planted so far has been with our own compost! The plants have taken to the soil very quickly and seemed to flourish within a couple of weeks!

We’ve also been successful in composting packaging from our suppliers. Darkwoods new compostable coffee bags and our compostable takeaway cups have all been added into the mix. Most importantly for us, we are much happier knowing that any spent food is making its way into the compost and is feeding our plants!



### **Do you think you will keep composting?**

**“We will be sticking with the composter throughout this summer and have even thought of filling up old coffee bags with our spare compost and giving them out to a few of our interested customers.”**

## Will composting work in your foodservice business?

The idea of composting your food waste is appealing, but you need to consider whether it is right for you. With all the demands on you and your team, it can be challenging to try and squeeze in a new process.

You can always start small - composting some of your food waste is better than none. You can experiment with it and make sure your team is doing it correctly before you think about scaling it up or spending lots of time on it. It is a process that can involve everyone...



**“It feels nice being able to separate leftovers from rubbish and create something in the process. At this stage there obviously isn’t any finished compost ready but I’m excited to get the finished product”**



**“We thought the project could/would be a good way to learn something new and a fun group project”**



Liz from Triangle Bakery in Ripponden, with their new tumbler composter

Once you get your team into a composting mindset, you'll be able to easily expand your compost to include as much of your waste as possible. Make it easy for your team to know what they can and can't compost by having different coloured bins around the kitchen with clear labelling.

Also, make waste management and compost methods part of your training for new employees so they can get up to speed. Tell your customers that you're doing it, so they know that plate scraps will be composted. They may also want to use your compost for their garden or allotment.



**“Changing our systems to incorporate composting is more than simply a management task; rather a challenge that our whole team needs to be involved with to find an efficient way that works for all. This is a group learning project for us all.”**

## Composting can make a lot of sense for a café, but there are challenges to consider:

- You need some outside space for your composter. You don't need much, a metre square will do, for a good size composter.
- You need to engage with it, and make sure your team are all engaged. It takes some effort to separate your kitchen waste and plate scraps, from non-compostable waste.
- It takes time. Depending how good your composter is, and how warm you keep it, and how well you compost, it can take 3-4 months – but it's worth the wait.
- Work with the seasons. It takes longer to make compost in cold weather etc.



**“The cold weather proved quite the challenge as our compost supply froze over and halted our progress by about a week. As they thawed, we were able to continue.”**

**“I think we have learned a lot about what items compost better than others and how much things are thrown away every day that can be used.”**

## What can you compost?

You can compost most waste from your kitchen, depending on the type of composter that you buy. A traditional garden compost bin will happily compost:



- Fruit, vegetables & veg peelings
- Bread, cakes, biscuits
- Coffee grounds & tea bags
- Egg shells
- Pulses, beans, pasta
- Plate scraps

- Paper napkins & wastepaper
- Shredded cardboard
- Old plants & soil from pots, hanging baskets



For the best results, you need a balanced mix of “green” and “brown” material. Green material is your food waste, mostly. Brown material is paper, shredded cardboard, wood chips, old fireplace ash. This adds the carbon that is needed to help the food waste compost well and not just turn to mush.

Our volunteer businesses really got into the idea of making a composting mix, formed from balancing both brown and green waste...

If you have a hot composter (more on this further down), you can also compost:

- Raw meat,
- Fish
- Small bones
- Dairy products







“We now put all of our food waste from our breakfast services and old newspapers from the day before into our compost bin. The variety of compostable objects have meant we have been keeping our eyes peeled for all sorts of waste we would normally throw straight in the bin.”

---

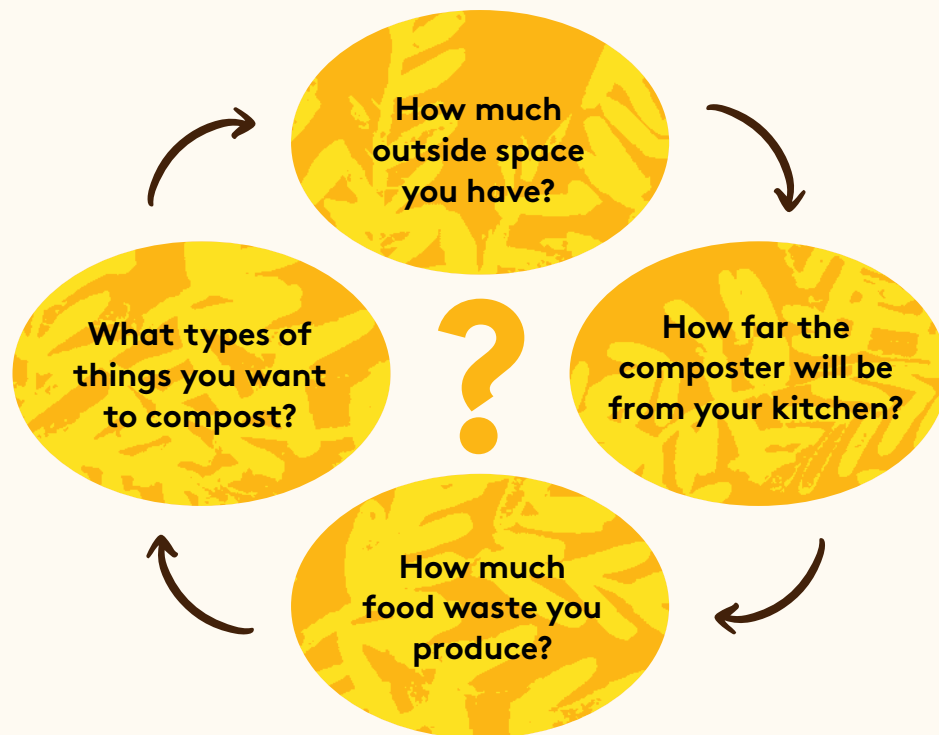
Amy from New Brook St Deli in Ilkley with her new tumbler composter



“I would say at least 1/3 of our table waste (dirty plates etc.) managed to reach the composter. In addition, any food that was due to spoil has also been added to the compost mix.”

## What type of compost bin should you get?

There are a few things you need to consider when choosing the right compost bin for your business:



Unless you have the space for two or three composters, or one large, hot composter, you are likely to produce more waste than you can compost at any one time.



This was one of the frustrations for some of our café project participants. They soon filled up their composter and then had to go back to throwing away food waste until they could empty the composter. But this did help them to focus on just how much waste they were generating. Composting will help you see waste in a different way...

You also need to think about how different types of composter work. There are some examples below.

## Traditional compost bin

A traditional compost bin is very simple. You put the waste in the top, and get the compost out of the bottom. They can be bit messy, as you will need to open the bottom up and scoop out the finished compost, so they are best suited for businesses that have some spare garden space away from the building.



- Pros:** they are cheap and simple to use  
**Cons:** they take a long time to compost waste, need mixing, and are a bit messy

## Tumbler composter

Tumblers are a good option for smaller cafes with limited space. They look a bit like a bingo tumbler – a barrel on a frame, with a handle on the side to turn. Tumblers keep all your waste contained and they don't need to be mixed by hand, like a traditional compost bin. They sit off the ground, so they are cleaner and easier to empty. For a bit more money, there are hot-tumbler composters on the market, like the Joraform tumbler.



- Pros:** easy to use, clean and tidy  
**Cons:** they can take a while to compost waste except the hot tumbler

## Hot composter

Hot composters are, basically, an insulated compost bin. When waste starts to compost, it generates a lot of heat. The insulated walls on a hot composter, keep more of this heat in, which speeds up the composting process and makes it easier to compost a wide range of waste, like meat and fish. Also see the Joraform Hot tumbler composter, which is a good option for limited space.



- Pros:** compost faster, allow a wider range of waste food
- Cons:** a bit more expensive, need mixing

## Commercial scale composter

If you have the space, the money and you generate a lot of food waste, there are larger, commercial scale composters available, such as the Ridan range. These are expensive, but very fast and efficient, and can take up to 400 litres of waste every week. They would suit a hotel or large, busy pub or restaurant. We have one of these at Dark Woods and we love it. All of our food waste, coffee grounds, compostable bags and chaff goes in to it.



- Pros:** huge capacity, fast composting, clean
- Cons:** expensive, large

**“The compost is getting better now, and our second half of the drum looks a lot better than our first. It seems we overestimated our knowledge on compostable items, but we seem to be improving.”**



**“I really hope our compost is ready in the next few months or so because I am excited to start again with all the knowledge I now have”**

# Getting Started with your Composter

Once you have decided to give composting a go; how do you do it? There is a lot of great information and top tips online; here are some of the essentials, informed by our volunteers to help you get started:



## FLTR Coffee

**A community coffee shop, located in a modern, small shopping area in Langford, Oxfordshire. They are rooted in their local community and have a passion for great coffee and sustainability. We asked Ute to reflect on their experience of the pilot project:**

**Before joining the project, what was your approach to waste and composting?**

Before getting involved in the composting pilot, we had not got far with looking at, and separating our waste. Our food waste is mostly coffee grounds and some leftovers from plates.

**What was your main goal, when deciding to take part in the pilot?**

We joined the pilot because we are passionate about coffee, community and generosity and we believe taking care of our environment and doing everything we can, even as a small business, is part of that. We hoped that, by taking part, we would learn more about how to manage the waste from the café.

**What were the main challenges you faced?**

As a small coffee shop the biggest challenge was to get the ratio of brown and green materials right. The biggest compostable waste we accumulate is used coffee grounds but, of course, that won't make compost on its own.

We added food waste from the shop and brought some from home as well to get the ratio right but I'm not sure we succeeded, to be honest. We also have limited outside space.



**What did you learn from being part of the pilot?**

**It has been very educational and informative, not only for us as a business but for our staff members individually as well.**

We learned a lot about what can go in which bin, and it felt good to be able to not only separate rubbish and recycling but also dispose of food waste and compostable waste properly.

**Do you think you will keep composting?**

We will struggle to keep the small garden composter we have as it is not ideally suited to our site. But we will continue to strictly separate coffee grounds from anything that is not compostable and will advertise that customers can come and pick up bags of it for their garden at the end of each day.

We will try to implement as many things as we can to minimise our environmental impact as a coffee shop.

## What if you don't have an area to compost in?

Some cafes will not have any spare outside space in which to put a composter. However, cafés can still compost organic materials through commercial composting collection services. Many waste management companies have compost trucks and there are also compost facilities nationwide.

There may already be a collection run in your area. If not, you could collaborate with other cafes, pubs and restaurants nearby to arrange a collection from a composting company. This will be more cost effective and attractive to the collection company.



**“We hope you have found this guide useful and that it has given you some food for thought. If you would like to chat, get in touch.”**







**DARKWOODS**  
**COFFEE**

HOLME MILLS . WEST SLAITHWAITE ROAD  
MARSDEN . WEST YORKSHIRE . UK . HD7 6LS  
DARKWOODSCOFFEE.CO.UK