

Constructing a Wire-Mesh Compost Bin

A wire-mesh compost bin can be built easily and inexpensively using galvanized chicken wire or hardware cloth. To stabilize the bin, posts or stakes can be used on the inside bin. However, using posts or stakes makes the unit harder to move. A unit constructed without posts or stakes is easy to lift, and provides access to the compost that is already "done" at the bottom of the pile. The wire-mesh allows good air flow through the compost. This fact sheet details materials and instructions for constructing the wire-mesh compost bin using chicken wire or hardware cloth.

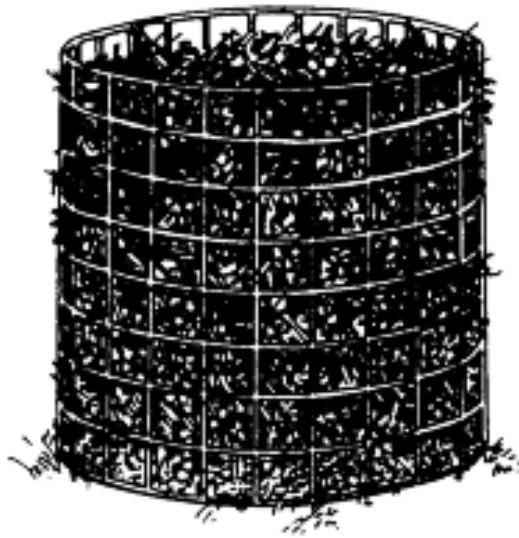


Figure 1 – Wire-Mesh Compost Bin

Materials

- ☑ At least a 10-foot length of 36-inch-wide 1-inch galvanized chicken wire

Or

- ☑ At least a 10-foot length of ½-inch-wide hardware cloth
(Note: The maximum bin diameter for a given length of chicken wire or hardware cloth is the length divided by 3.14.)
- ☑ Heavy wire for ties
- ☑ Three or four 4-foot-tall wooden* or metal posts (for chicken wire bin)

Tools

- ☑ Heavy-duty wire or tin snips
- ☑ Pliers
- ☑ Hammer (for chicken wire bin)
- ☑ Metal file (for hardware cloth bin)
- ☑ Work gloves

Building a Compost Bin Using Chicken Wire

1. Fold back 3 to 4 inches of wire at each end of the cut piece to provide a strong, clean edge that will not poke or snag, and that will be easy to latch.
2. Stand the wire in a circle and set it in place for the compost pile.
3. Cut the heavy wire into lengths for ties and latch the ends of the chicken wire together.
4. Space the wood or metal posts around the inside of the chicken-wire circle. Position the posts tightly against the wire, and pound them firmly into the ground for support.

Building a Compost Bin Using Hardware Cloth

1. Trim the ends to the hardware cloth so that the wires are flush with a cross wire to get rid of edges that could poke or scratch hands. Lightly file each wire along the cut edge to ensure safe handling when opening and closing the bin.
2. Bend the hardware cloth into a circle, and stand it in place for the compost pile.
3. Cut the heavy wire into lengths for ties. Attach the ends of the hardware cloth together with the wire ties, using pliers.

*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 forestry.extension@uky.edu.

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.

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. Original 1996.

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