

Low-Cost Mulching Options for Weed Control and Soil Health



Mulching is a key part of gardening. Mulching offers soil improvement which makes everything in your garden grow better. It is also one of the most versatile and cost-effective solutions for curbing weed growth in a garden. This guide explores the significance of mulching, its broader benefits, and various low-cost mulching options for reaping the benefits without adding expenses.

Why Mulching Matters for Weed Control and Soil Health

There are many different reasons to utilize low-cost mulching in your garden. The two key benefits are weed control and soil health.

Low-Cost Mulching for Weed Control

Mulching serves as a formidable defense against weeds by creating a physical barrier that suppresses weed growth. Mulch smothers weed seeds. Moreover, it hinders the weeds and their seeds from access to light. Therefore, mulch effectively reduces the emergence and proliferation of weeds. This minimizes the need for constant manual weeding. Additionally, it reduces any need for more costly forms of weed control.

Low-Cost Mulching for Soil Health

Mulch also acts as a protective layer over the soil. It shields the soil from erosion caused by wind or water. It regulates soil temperature, preserving moisture levels by reducing evaporation and preventing soil compaction. Over time, organic mulches break down, enriching the soil with essential nutrients and improving its structure. It is one of the best things that you can do to improve the health of your garden overall. And it doesn't have to cost much.

Other Benefits of Mulching

These two benefits are key to why you want to consider low-cost mulching. However, there are other [benefits of mulching](#) as well.

- Enhancement of biodiversity by supporting diverse soil microorganisms
- Reduced need for frequent watering
- Improvement of nutrient availability as organic mulches decompose
- Prevention of soil splash, keeping plants clean and disease-free
- Aesthetic enhancement by providing a neat appearance to garden beds
- Protection of delicate plant roots from extreme temperature fluctuations

- Creation of a natural habitat for beneficial insects and organisms
- Sound insulation by reducing noise levels in urban or noisy environments
- Prevention of fruit and vegetable spoilage by keeping produce off the ground
- Prevention of erosion on slopes and hillsides, preserving the landscape
- Encouragement of earthworm activity
- Reduction in the spread of certain plant diseases by maintaining soil hygiene

Low-Cost Mulching Options for Weed Control and Soil Health

Generally, the [cost of mulch](#) can vary based on factors such as the material used, availability, and the region where it's purchased. Mulches made from specific hardwood barks or exotic woods can be more expensive due to their limited availability or processing costs. You can spend a lot of money on mulch if you want to go that route. For example, you can buy specialty mulches such as cocoa mulch, rubber mulch, or dyed mulch. However, if you're looking for low-cost mulching options, you don't have to look far. There are so many great options.

Organic Mulch Options

Several low-cost organic mulch options are effective for gardens and landscapes. You probably already have them in your yard or garden. Alternatively, you can typically get them at a low cost. Examples include:

Wood Chips / Bark

These organic materials slowly decompose, enriching the soil with organic matter. They are very effective for weed suppression as well as for moisture retention. You can often

get the material free or at a low cost from tree trimming services.

Leaves

You probably already have plenty of free leaves, especially if you live in a place where the leaves fall during fall. Free. This organic material provides insulation and retains moisture. You can spread out or shred the leaves for faster decomposition.

Pine Needles

Often free for collection in areas with pine trees, this option provides a lightweight and long-lasting mulch. Their acidic nature benefits acid-loving plants like azaleas or blueberries. That's a point you want to consider; different organic mulches offer different benefits for different plants.

Grass Clippings

This option is high in nitrogen, providing nutrients as it decomposes. Spread thin layers of grass clippings to prevent matting and odor. If you live in a grassy area, this is a free option.

Straw/Hay

Unless you happen to live on a farm, this might not be a free option. However, it's typically affordable. Straw/ hay are available in bales at garden centers or farm supply stores. It's an effective mulch for weed suppression and moisture retention. And it adds organic matter to improve the soil as it decomposes.

Livestock Manure

This option adds nutrients and improves soil structure when aged or composted properly. It can be sourced from local farms or stables for free or cheap.

Recycled Materials

In addition to organic materials for mulch, you can use recycled materials. And some of these (like coffee grounds/compost) fall into both categories.

Newspaper / Cardboard / Shredded Paper

Layer newspapers or cardboard sheets over the soil. You can combine this with any of the organic mulch options above to easily keep them in place. This technique suffocates weeds while breaking down over time.

Cloth / Fabric Scraps

Old fabric pieces or burlap sacks serve as effective weed barriers. Lay them over the soil and cover them with organic mulch for added insulation.

Compost

Homemade compost from kitchen scraps and yard waste can be one of the best low-cost mulching options you'll find. It is rich in nutrients, promotes soil health, and aids plant growth.

Coffee Grounds

Often available for free from local coffee shops or your own kitchen remnants, coffee grounds are high in nitrogen, which is beneficial for soil and plants. They can be used as mulch alone or incorporated into compost.

Natural Ground Covers

You can also plant natural ground covers in your garden to add beauty while adding mulch. Options like clover, vetch, or even certain types of low-growing herbs serve as living mulches, providing numerous benefits to gardens. These ground covers act as living carpets, suppressing weed growth, retaining moisture, and protecting soil from erosion. Their root systems

enhance soil structure, fostering a healthier environment for plant roots while reducing the need for additional mulch. Additionally, these ground covers often require minimal maintenance, making them a cost-effective and sustainable choice for gardeners aiming to improve soil health and curb weed growth without hefty expenses.

Read More:

- [Using Shredded Paper as Garden Mulch](#)
 - [Top 13 Benefits of Using Rice Hulls in Gardens](#)
 - [5 Ways to Reduce Water Usage in the Garden](#)
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Could My Dogs Save Me Money in The Garden?



I'm casually looking to move into a new place where I would have more of a yard. This means that I would have more space for plant life. It also means that my dogs would have a place to romp around. However, those two things would be shared. For the most part, I assume that the dogs aren't great for a garden. They dig, they chew, they barrel their big bodies around and bang into things. But I'm trying to see it another way. What benefits could the dogs have for the garden? Could they even help me save money there?

Pest Control

Dogs obviously have an incredible sense of smell. And mine are keen on protecting their territory. This natural instinct could make them excellent at warding off common garden pests. Squirrels, raccoons, and other critters might think twice before venturing into a garden where a dog is on patrol. This isn't an issue where I'm living now. However, I know that in

homes I've stayed at in the past where there are bigger yards, this is definitely a common issue. My dogs wouldn't harm the other animals but they would likely chase them off which means that those creatures couldn't come in and damage the plant life.

Natural Fertilizer?

One of the questions I have is whether or not their dog waste could be used as a natural fertilizer. In other words, can I compost their poop and use it for plants? After all, my two large dogs generate a whole lot of waste!

As far as I can tell from searching online and asking in forums, it seems that you can safely compost your own dog's waste. You don't want to use it as fertilizer on edible plants. In other words, if I was going to grow vegetables to eat then I wouldn't want to use my dog's waste there.

However, if the plants are hardy and aren't going to be consumed by humans, then it seems safe to compost the waste for that purpose. The [American Kennel Club](#) explains that the two biggest concerns are the odor and the potential for parasites or germs. However, they note that the odor is easy to control when composting. More importantly, they explain that if you're just in your own yard with your own dogs and they get regular wellness treatments then it's actually fairly unlikely that you're going to have parasites.

It's something I'd have to do more research on but it seems possible that the dogs could save money in the garden by providing this natural fertilizer opportunity.

Benefits of Digging Dogs

My dogs dig. I tend to assume that this would be a problem in a garden. However, that isn't necessarily the only way to view

this story. If the dogs can learn to dig in certain places where they're allowed to dig, then they might actually offer some benefits to the garden. For example:

1. **Weed Control:** Dogs can help control weeds by trampling or digging them up. Their natural curiosity can lead to them digging in the garden, inadvertently uprooting weeds and preventing their growth.
2. **Compost Turners:** Some dogs enjoy digging in compost piles. While this behavior may not be appreciated in all cases, it can be beneficial for turning and aerating compost, which accelerates decomposition and produces nutrient-rich compost for your garden.
3. **Soil Aeration:** When dogs play or run in the garden, their paws can help aerate the soil. This improved soil structure enhances root growth and water penetration, benefiting plant health.

Could I teach the dogs to dig in the right places?

Obviously, there's more to unpack here. Could the dogs learn where to dig and where not to dig? Possibly. I currently allow them to play with recyclables in the home. They know which area contains the stuff they're allowed to destroy and they don't destroy other things.

So, they could definitely learn. For example, I could teach them to dig in the compost. Although, honestly, I have mixed feelings about that because then there's compost on their paws when they come back in the house. But I don't know if I could really teach them about digging up weeds and leaving the rest of the plants alone.

The Joy of the Garden

Honestly, the thing that my dogs do most for me is bring me

lots of joy. They live in the moment. They remind me to be curious, open, and playful. As a result, they help enliven any space so that I appreciate it more. They would definitely do this if we had a bigger yard for them. They would definitely help me appreciate that space more.

This has the potential to save money while adding joy in a few different ways. First of all, it means that we would all spend more time in the yard together. This means that I wouldn't have to spend money on a dog walker to take them out because they would get their exercise with me in the yard. As a byproduct of that, I would get my own exercise in the yard. More time in the yard means less time on other forms of potentially expensive entertainment to pass the time.

Also, when you're in the garden more, you're going to focus more on what's there. I imagine that spending more time in the garden would allow me to see more potential there. It would allow me to see how to help different plants thrive. Moreover, it would show me opportunities for creative expression in the gardening process. As my dogs investigate things up close, so will I. All of this has the potential to improve the garden, the lives of myself and the pups, and maybe even cost savings on our activities back there.

What do you think? Are dogs good for a garden, bad for a garden, or are there just simply pros and cons to consider?

Read More:

- [5 Reasons I Enjoy Lia's Living Almanac](#)
- [How to Garden Frugally](#)
- [20 Tips for Gardening with Dogs](#)
- [10 Household Items That Can Be Composted – and 5 That Can't](#)

Top 7 Eco-Friendly Peat Moss Alternatives



Peat moss has a long history of gardening benefits. However, it also poses significant problems for the environment when you use peat moss. Therefore you might want to explore peat moss alternatives. There are plenty of great options that do the job without damaging the earth.

What Is Peat Moss?

Peat moss is a type of organic material that comes from the decomposition of plants in peat bogs over thousands of years.

A peat bog, also known as a peatland, is a type of wetland ecosystem formed over thousands of years through the accumulation of dead vegetation.

Reasons People Use Peat Moss in Gardening

Peat moss is used in gardens for various reasons:

Soil Amendment

Peat moss is an excellent soil amendment that improves soil structure and texture. It helps to loosen dense soils, improving drainage in clay soils and retaining moisture in sandy soils. The fibrous nature of peat moss also enhances aeration, which is vital for root growth.

Water Retention

Peat moss has a high water-holding capacity, enabling it to retain moisture in the soil. This characteristic is especially useful during dry periods, as it helps to keep the soil consistently moist, providing a more stable environment for plants.

pH Adjustment

Peat moss is acidic, and its presence in the soil can lower the pH level, making it more acidic. This is beneficial for acid-loving plants, such as blueberries, rhododendrons, and azaleas, which thrive in slightly acidic conditions.

Organic Matter

As an organic material, peat moss contributes to soil fertility by slowly releasing nutrients as it breaks down. It also serves as a substrate for beneficial soil microorganisms, improving the overall health of the soil ecosystem.

Seed Starting and Potting Mixes

Peat moss is commonly used in seed-starting mixes and potting

mixes for container gardening. Its light and fluffy texture provides an ideal medium for young seedlings to establish their root systems.

Soil Conditioner

When applied as a top dressing or worked into the soil, peat moss acts as a soil conditioner, improving the overall quality of the soil and enhancing plant growth.

Environmental Problems with Peat Moss

Unfortunately, using peat moss creates problems for the earth. Peat bogs are unique ecosystems that store a significant amount of carbon and provide a habitat for various plants and wildlife. Unsustainable harvesting of peat moss can lead to the depletion of these valuable habitats and release stored carbon into the atmosphere. Additional problems related to using peat moss include impact on water quality and quantity, increased flooding in over-harvested areas, and the loss of species diversity.

Top 7 Eco-Friendly Peat Moss Alternatives

Several peat moss alternatives are available for gardeners who want to reduce their environmental impact. Gardeners can create healthier soils, support sustainable practices, and reduce the impact on sensitive peatland ecosystems. Some of the best peat moss alternatives include:

Coconut Coir

[Coconut coir](#) is a renewable resource derived from coconut husks, which are usually discarded as waste. Using coconut coir as a peat moss alternative helps recycle this agricultural byproduct and reduces the need for landfill disposal. It has similar water-holding capacity and aeration

properties but is more sustainable and environmentally friendly. And yet, it is a more sustainable option compared to peat moss.

Do note that the production and transportation of coconut coir might have some environmental impact. This includes energy consumption and carbon emissions associated with processing and transportation. However, these impacts are generally lower compared to peat moss extraction.

Compost

Compost is made from organic waste, such as kitchen scraps and yard trimmings, which would otherwise end up in landfills. By composting organic materials, gardeners divert waste from landfills. This reduces methane emissions. Moreover, it creates a nutrient-rich soil amendment that improves soil health. There are very few potential drawbacks to using compost as a peat moss alternative, which is why it's a common peat moss alternative.

Leaf Mold

Leaf mold is the result of decomposed leaves and is a valuable organic material for improving soil structure and water retention. It is an excellent source of nutrients for plants and can be made by composting leaves over time. Note that leaf mold may take a longer time to break down compared to compost, though. Therefore, gardeners may need to plan and start the decomposition process in advance.

Well-Rotted Manure

Well-rotted manure is a byproduct of animal husbandry and agriculture. Using well-rotted manure as a soil amendment can help recycle organic waste. Aged and well-rotted animal manure can enrich the soil with nutrients and improve its fertility. It also enhances soil structure and microbial activity.

Note that manure from intensively farmed livestock may contain

residual antibiotics or other substances that could impact soil and water quality if not properly managed. Ensuring that the manure comes from a reputable and sustainable source is essential if you want to use it as a peat moss alternative.

Pine Bark

Pine bark, when aged and ground, can be used as a soil amendment to improve aeration and drainage in the soil. It is particularly useful for plants that prefer acidic conditions. Since it is a byproduct of the timber industry, you're making use of something that would otherwise go to the landfill. Note that some pine bark products may contain chemicals or preservatives used during timber processing. That's just something you want to check for before adding it to your garden.

Rice Hulls

[Rice hulls](#) are lightweight and provide good aeration to the soil. They can be used as mulch or mixed into the soil to improve its structure. Like with pine bark, they are waste from another industry that we can use as gardeners. Like with coconut coir, there may be environmental impacts of transport but these should be less than with peat moss extraction.

Peat-Free Potting Mixes

Many commercial potting mixes now come with peat-free formulations, using various combinations of the alternatives mentioned above. These mixes provide suitable growing mediums for various plants. Note, however, that some commercially available peat-free mixes might still contain non-renewable resources or synthetic materials. Checking the ingredients and sourcing sustainably produced mixes is important as a result.

Read More:

- [5+ Cheap Ways to Make Soil More Acidic](#)

- [DIY Compost Using a 5-gallon Bucket](#)
 - [Starting Seeds Inside: The Basic Guide](#)
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10 Household Items That Can Be Composted (and 5 That Can't)



10 HOUSEHOLD ITEMS

*That Can Be
Composted (and
5 That Can't)*

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Composting household items is the most efficient way to create nutrient gold for your garden. If you can use up what you have on hand, you can save money and reduce the amount of waste you

create.

So what can you toss into the [compost](#) bin? Here are ten household items you can compost.

Composting Household Items

There's one big rule when composting household items: Make sure you cut them into tiny pieces!

Chucking big pieces of anything into your compost bin is an easy way to fail. Composting takes time. The bigger the items inside your bin, the longer it'll take for them to break down.

- **Leaf and grass clippings.** When your yard needs a good sprucing up, collect the dead plant matter and toss it into your compost bin.
- **Fruit and vegetable peels.** You can also throw in the cores of fruits like apples and peaches. Got rotting fruit at the back of your produce drawer? You can toss that into the compost, too.
- **Parchment paper.** This is also fine to put into the compost bin. Just make sure it doesn't have a waxy coating.
- **Houseplant detritus.** Frequent pruning helps keep [houseplants](#) looking neat and tidy. Don't throw away all those dead leaves, though. Pop them into your compost bin. As long as the plant matter isn't diseased, you can compost dead plant matter right at home. If you're dealing with diseased plants, throw those leaves and roots into the commercial composting bin—if your city provides one.

Composting Other Household Items

- **Teabags.** Not all tea bags are compostable. Check the label to make sure the bag will degrade in your compost bin. If in doubt, tear them open and compost the

innards.

- **Coffee grounds.** Regardless of the kind of coffee you love to drink, you're bound to create a lot of coffee ground waste. It can be annoying to head to the compost bin every time you brew coffee, though. Instead, grab a glass container and fill it with used grounds. When it's full, toss them into the compost.
- **Paper plates.** As long as they don't have a waxy coating, paper plates can go into the compost.
- **Bamboo skewers and chopsticks.** Again, as long as they aren't coated in some type of film, these are also fair game for the compost. I also like using these as supports for my [tomato](#), pepper, and eggplant seedlings.
- **Cardboard.** Don't expect to chuck in giant pieces of cardboard and successfully compost it. Cut it into small pieces before tossing it into your bin.
- **Paper bags.** The same goes for paper bags. Make sure you're adding small pieces to your bin.

Household Items You Can't Compost

Composting household items is a great way to reduce your waste production. However, you can't compost everything. Here are some things you should avoid tossing into your compost bin:

- **Eggshells.** People will recommend composting eggshells until they're blue in the face, but the truth is that they decompose extremely slowly.
- **Meat and bones.** Save these for the commercial compost bin. Your at-home bin doesn't produce enough heat to kill off potentially dangerous pathogens.
- **Anything with a waxy or glossy coating.** A plastic coating means the item won't compost, and it may even contain harmful toxins.
- **Big branches and large plants.** It sounds like a good idea, but...it isn't. Anything big is going to take way too much time to decompose.

- **Cooked food.** You run the risk of inviting pests into or around your compost bin by adding cooked food to the mix.

Read More

[Yes, you can garden for free](#)

[Ten ways to get free plants for your garden](#)

[How to get free plants](#)

4 Cost-Effective Organic Garden Fertilizers



4 COST-EFFECTIVE

Organic Garden Fertilizers

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Regardless of what you're growing, your plants need nutrients. Without fertilizer, your plants will fail to thrive and grow big and strong. In the case of edibles, a lack of nutrients

can limit your crop and lead to poor production. Unfortunately, many fertilizers on the market are expensive. Thankfully there are cost-effective organic fertilizers you can use to boost your garden's productivity.

A word of caution

Before I jump into a list of cost-effective organic fertilizer suggestions, I want to talk a bit about fertilizing in general. Piling on fertilizer will NOT automatically make your garden more lush and productive. Fertilizing without testing your soil first can lead to a host of problems down the road. With fertilizer, more is not always better.

Always [test your soil](#) first to find out whether your garden is lacking nutrients. Read up about plant nutrient needs to ensure you're applying the right fertilizer.

While organic fertilizer is a lot less harmful to the environment than synthetic fertilizer, too much of it can still pose problems, so be cautious! If you think your plants are hungry for nutrients, double check first. They may be stressed or ailing for a different reason.

Organic fertilizers are an excellent alternative to synthetic ones because they help build soil quality over time and improve the soil's ability to retain nutrients and water. They're a lot less concentrated, which helps prevent overfertilization—though, it's still possible with certain commercial options.

Cost-Effective Organic Fertilizers

Fertilizers can be expensive. Organic options are even more so! So what are the options available for a frugal gardener? Here are a few cost-effective organic fertilizers to choose from:

Worm castings. Set up a worm farm or attract worms using a

[bucket system](#) and enjoy the fruits of their labor. Castings is a nice way of saying poop, but this excrement is mighty powerful! Worm poop is high in nitrogen and full of beneficial microbes and bacteria.

Coco coir. Coconut husks are an inexpensive, earth-friendly alternative to peat moss. While coir doesn't contain nutrients, it helps condition the soil and improves water and nutrient retention. It's also a great mulch option.

Homemade compost. It's easy to make your own compost at home! You'll need a balanced mix of kitchen scraps and other materials like dead leaves and grass clippings to get some rotting action going. Over time, the materials break down into a powerhouse of nutrients for your garden.

Seaweed. Sea kelp fertilizer is pricey, but if you live near a shoreline, you can collect your own smelly seaweed, let it rot for a bit, and make a seaweed fertilizer tea. It's not ideal for people who are sensitive to pungent smells, but it's a great totally free source of nutrients!

DIY Compost Using a 5 Gallon Bucket



Compost is an essential medium for any gardener. It enriches the soil, provides nutrients to plants, and helps improve soil composition. It's also easy to make compost using simple items

you probably have lying around your home. Here's how to make a 5-gallon bucket compost bin to get yourself some free compost.

Tools

I covered a similar topic earlier this year when I blogged about creating a low-cost [worm compost bin](#). If you're not a fan of worms and want to avoid dealing directly with creepy crawlies, here's an alternative method for creating your own compost.

Often, people use storebought bins to compost produce scraps and yard refuse. You can also build a bin from scratch. If you're not very handy and don't have room for a full-size compost bin, you're in luck! A bucket compost system works in a pinch and is great for people who garden on their balconies or porch.

What do you need?

- **A 5-gallon bucket.** That's pretty much it. If you don't have one, you can probably grab one at your local hardware store for cheap. But ask around, someone you know might have one they don't need.
- **A drill.** This is to drill holes in the bucket. If you don't have power tools, use a hammer and nail.

Assembling Your DIY Compost Bin

Take your 5-gallon compost bucket and drill holes in the bottom and the lid. You need to let the compost aerate to prevent mold growth.

Use something at the bottom of your bin to prevent the drainage holes from getting lodged with waste. You can use sticks, rocks, whatever works.

The next step? Filling up the bucket!

You can fill your 5-gallon DIY compost bucket with fruit and veggie scraps, grass clippings, and other compost-friendly materials. Not sure what you can put in? Here's a [handy guide](#).

It's best to keep your bin outside to prevent odors from stinking up your home. Roll the bin around occasionally to ensure the materials mix together. If you choose to line the bottom of your bin with rocks, it may be tougher to mix the contents, though.

Always make sure the lid is tightly affixed to the bucket to keep pests from breaking in and feasting on your rotting materials.

How Long Will it Take?

It can take a while for matter in your compost bucket to decompose fully. The rate of decomposition depends on the weather, where you live, and what you stuff inside. Avoid filling the bin up too much. If there's not enough air, it'll take longer for stuff to break down.

Help your 5-gallon bucket compost bin contents along by putting your bin in a spot with lots of [sunlight](#).

Need a visual guide to get your 5-gallon compost bucket ready? Check out this YouTube tutorial:

Are Compost Bins Worth the

Money?



Compost is an excellent amendment for your garden, and making your own is reasonably straightforward and cheap. Is it worth investing in a bin, though? Are compost bins worth the money?

Let's take a look at the cost of a traditional compost bin and the benefits of buying a pre-built container.

Cost of a compost bin

To find out whether compost bins are worth the money, we must understand the cost of the average model.

Storebought bins range in price but on average cost about \$100. The larger and more complex the bin, the higher the price tag. Tumbler-style bins tend to cost a bit more than freestanding plastic options.

Indoor compost systems designed to break down food

mechanically are cost-prohibitive, and the technology still has a long way to go.

There are, however, plenty of simple, inexpensive bin designs available on the market.

Benefits of a store-bought compost bin

Why bother purchasing a bin? Here are a few pros:

- **Ready to go.** Store-bought compost bins are ready to use right out of the box, often with little assembly required. They're great for gardeners with minimal DIY experience.
- **Great for beginners.** If you're totally new to composting, buying a bin is an excellent way to get started. Many bins also come with handy instructions.
- **Pays for itself.** If you use it correctly, your bin will pay for itself over time. You won't need to buy bags of compost when the time comes to amend your soil.

Buying a compost bin isn't worth it, however, if you expect to move in the near future since most bins are not easily portable.

DIY compost bin ideas

Frugal gardeners who prefer not to spend too much cash at once can create DIY compost bins from found, recycled, or inexpensive materials. You don't need much to make your very own compost container. Here are a few ideas for building your own bin from scratch:

[Worm compost bin](#)

I wrote a post a little while ago about how to create an easy DIY worm compost bin.

[Cinderblock compost bin](#)

Have leftover cinder blocks from long past outdoor projects? Use them to build a sturdy compost bin.

[Wire compost bin](#)

This innovative, easy to build compost bin idea requires minimal tools and materials and keeps all your green and brown waste in one tidy spot.

[Milkcrate compost bin](#)

Check out this creative idea for repurposing milk crates into a super simple and effective compost bin.

[Leftover pallet compost bin](#)

Don't let leftover pallets go to waste. Use them to create a DIY compost bin. Instead of tossing those old pallets to the side of the road, recycle them into a garden project.

DIY Tumbler Compost Bin

How Much Dirt Does my Raised Bed Garden Need?



One of the benefits of raised bed gardening is the ability to use your own soil mix. It's a serious advantage for those stuck living in places where the soil quality is poor or where there's no soil to speak of (e.g., those who have a concrete yard).

But how do you figure out how much dirt you need for your raised bed? It seems daunting, but it's really a simple math problem.

How much soil do you need?

Here's what you need to calculate how much soil your garden bed requires:

The Dimensions of Your Garden Bed(s): What's the total volume of the bed's interior? Think back to high school math class now. Volume is determined by multiplying width, height, and depth.

Here's a real-world example:

- My beds are 4 feet by 4 feet, with a depth of 3 feet. The volume of the interior is $4 \times 4 \times 3 = 48$ cubic feet.
- If you have more than one bed, you'll need to multiply that total to get your final volume required.
- I have four beds of this size, so I'll need a total of $48 \times 4 = 192$ cubic feet of soil.

Thankfully, most soil is sold by the cubic foot, so it should be reasonably easy to figure out how many bags or truckloads you'll need to be delivered.

Buying from somewhere that uses a different unit of measurement? Use a simple conversion calculator online.

Your Soil Mix

You've figured out how much soil you need to fill your raised beds. Great! Now it's time to decide what type of mix you'll use to fill them.

Some garden centers sell and deliver soil mixes in bulk, but they're not always the right blend for a vegetable garden. Ask what the mix consists of before ordering.

The Square Foot Gardening Foundation recommends equal parts of the following when creating a homemade soil mix (also called *Mel's Mix*) for raised beds:

- Compost (preferably from a variety of sources)
- Peat moss
- Vermiculite

The mix promotes proper airflow and drainage. It's also filled with nutrients and doesn't dry out as quickly as other soil mixes.

Soil Mix on a Budget

Struggling with the high cost of bags of soil, compost, vermiculite, and peat moss? Check with your local garden center to find out about the cost of soil delivery. Deliveries in bulk – dumped in your driveway or on your property and not in bags – are typically cheaper than buying bags separately.

If that still seems too pricey, consider filling your boxes with compost only. It's not an ideal solution, but it's a workable and affordable one.

Because my boxes are quite high, filling them was a huge and expensive challenge. I had to find workarounds to be able to fill them without enough soil.

Bulk Up Your Beds

If you're on a tight budget, consider the use of filler materials to reach the desired soil level in your raised beds.

Use inexpensive things to bulk up your raised beds. Examples include:

- Dead leaves
- Sand
- Layers of cardboard
- Leftover dirt from construction projects (check online marketplaces for free dirt available around town)
- Rocks
- Poor-quality soil (snatch up cheap bags of filler soil at your local hardware store when it goes on sale . Fill up the bottom of your beds with the lower-quality stuff before adding a premium or custom mix on top)