Wire Bin Composter and 3-Bin Composting System

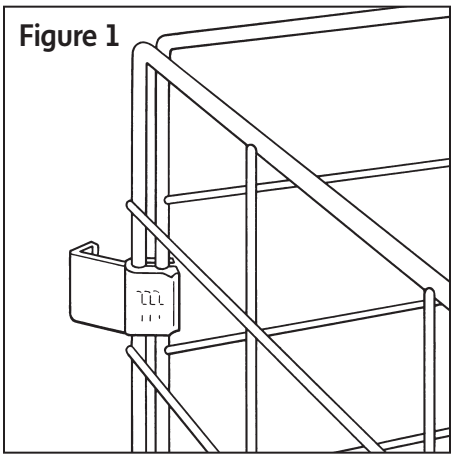
Assembly Instructions for Single Wire Bin Composter

Step 1: Using the four Wire Panels and Cage Clips, you will be forming a square bin by connecting the Panels together with Cage Clips. At the top, middle and bottom of each corner, push the open side of the Clip onto the two bars and snap the Clip shut (Figure 1). Place the bottom Clip just above the lowest horizontal rung. Start with two Panels, with the smooth sides together and welded sides facing out.

Step 2: Add the third and fourth sides one at a time.

A single Wire Bin Composter holds up to 20 cubic feet of materials. By connecting 2 or 3 Wire Bins, you can have one bin to collect waste, one for cooking compost, and one for finished compost or for leaves (Figure 2).

Figure 1



Assembly Instructions for 3-Bin Composting System

Step 1: Assemble two Single Bin Composters, as described. You will use eight Wire Panels and 24 Cage Clips. (Figure 2)

Step 2: Join the Bins using the two remaining Wire Panels and 12 Cage Clips. Push each Clip onto one connecting Wire Panel and one Bin Panel at the top, middle and bottom of each corner (Figure 3). Do not try to push clips onto three panels. Make sure all clips are closed and secure.

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Figure 2

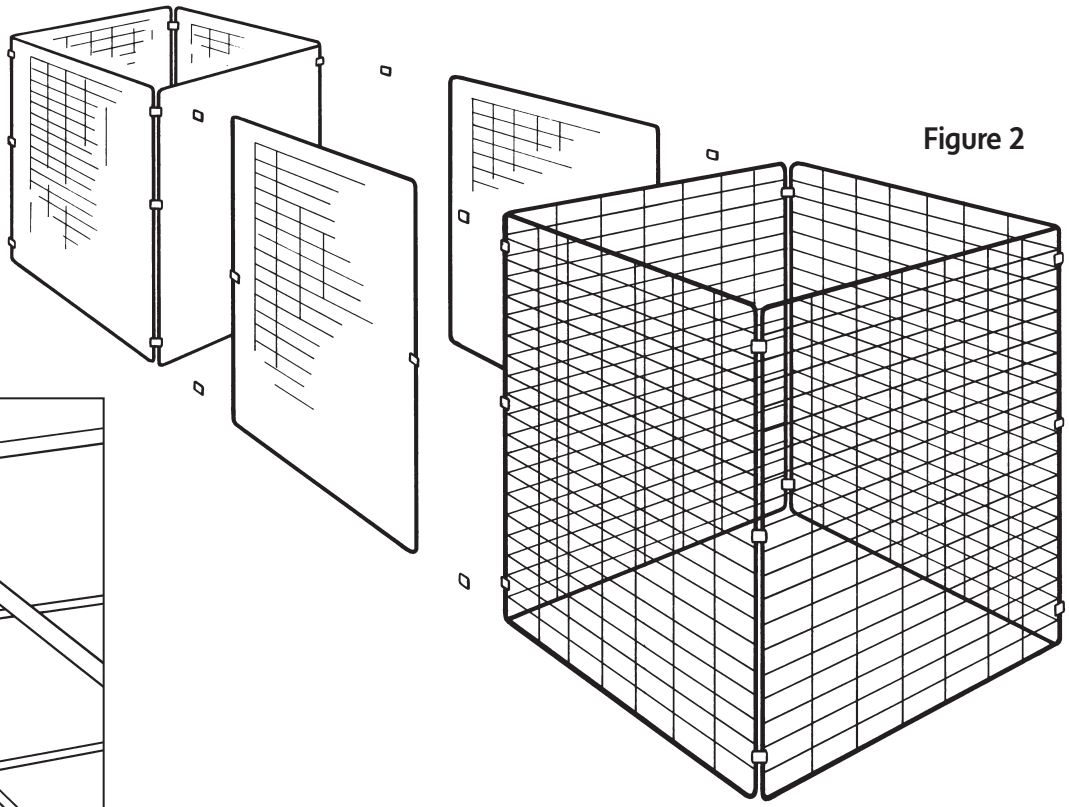
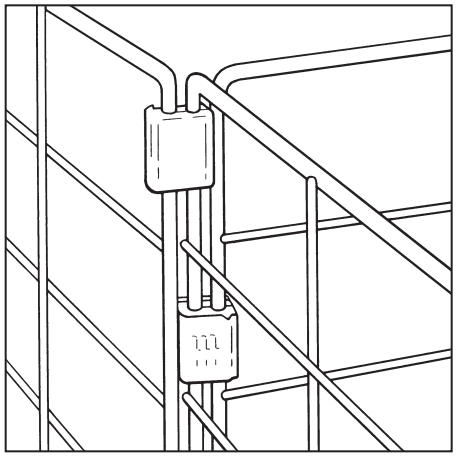


Figure 3



How Compost Happens

Organic matter is transformed into compost through the work of microorganisms, soil fauna, enzymes and fungi. With the right materials, the decomposition process can work very rapidly, sometimes in as little as 3 to 4 weeks! It all depends on the compost materials and kind of environment you provide for the decomposers to do their work.

Even if you don't provide the optimum environment, decomposition will still happen. Because the Wire Bin Composter is a continuous composter, you can continue to add materials to the top of the pile. With periodic turning and aerating, you should be able to remove finished compost after several months.

If you would like to make an abundance of compost in the shortest amount of time, the trick is to balance these four things:

Carbon: Carbon-rich materials are the energy food for microorganisms. You can identify high-carbon plant materials because they are dry, tough or fibrous, and tan or brown in color. Examples are dry leaves, straw, rotted hay, sawdust, shredded paper, and cornstalks.

Nitrogen: High-nitrogen materials provide the protein-rich components that microorganisms require to grow and multiply. Freshly pulled weeds, fresh grass clippings, over-ripe fruits and vegetables, kitchen scraps and other moist green matter are the sorts of nitrogen-rich materials you'll probably have on hand. Other high-protein organic matter includes kelp meal, seaweed, manure and bone meal.

Water: Moisture is very important for the composting process. But too much moisture will drown the microorganisms, and too little will dehydrate them.

A general rule of thumb is to keep the material in your compost pile as moist as a well-wrung sponge. If you need to add water, insert your garden hose into the middle of the pile in several places, or sprinkle the pile with water as needed. Covering the pile with a tarp makes it easier to maintain the right moisture level.

Oxygen: To do their work most efficiently, microorganisms require a lot of oxygen. When your first compost pile is assembled, there will probably be plenty of air between the layers of materials. But, as the microorganisms begin to work, they consume oxygen. Unless you turn or in some way aerate your compost pile, they will run out of oxygen and become sluggish, slowing down the decomposition.

Batch Composting

If you have been collecting organic materials and want to make a batch of compost, you can do this by filling the composter all at once. To make a batch, layer 4" to 6" of dry, shredded leaves, small twigs, garden trimmings and/or straw in the bottom. If you are using one of our compost activators, add it now.

Then add a 2" to 3" layer of grass clippings, kitchen scraps and other nitrogen-rich materials. Sprinkle lightly with water. The moisture content is similar to a well-wrung sponge. Repeat the steps, layering the materials until the composter is full.

Checking the Process

After 2 or 3 days, the pile should feel warm to the touch. You can check the internal temperature of the center of your mix with a compost thermometer. Temperatures between 120 to 160 degrees F indicate the beneficial organisms are multiplying and doing their job decomposing materials.

Use a garden fork or a compost aerator to mix the materials every two or three days to keep the process active. Periodically squeeze a handful of compost to see if it feels like a damp sponge. If it does, the moisture level is fine. If it feels dry, add a little more water. Be careful not to add too much.

As the batch cools, continue to aerate the compost every day or two. Depending on the material you added, the compost should be ready in 6 to 8 weeks.

Finished compost will contain fine and coarse material. Sift the compost to use it in potting mixes. Use the coarser compost as a nutritious top-dressing around outdoor plantings and in your garden! You may also used finished compost as a starter for your next batch.

Composting Tips

- Check the moisture level, keeping the batch damp, not soggy.
- Use a garden fork or compost aerator to mix and fluff the compost every few days after the batch heats up. Composting requires oxygen, so mix it well.
- During cold weather in fall and winter, the composting process may slow down or stop entirely until spring. To start it up again, add a compost activator and some leaves, food scraps and grass clippings. Mix well to incorporate air and add water to moisten the materials if necessary.
- Do NOT add meats, pet waste, fats, bones, fish, dairy products, trash or plastic to the composter. These do not break down easily and can attract unwanted pests to your compost.

For articles on making and using compost and to find other composting tools and accessories, please call or visit www.gardeners.com