



Backyard Composting:

Wire Mesh Bin

A wire mesh bin is inexpensive and easy to build out of either galvanized chicken wire or hardware cloth. (Nongalvanized chicken wire can also be used but will not last very long.) Posts provide more stability for a chicken wire bin, but make the bin difficult to move. A wire mesh bin made without posts is easy to lift and relocate, refill to mix and aerate the composting material. When a bin is full, start a new bin and manage the first one to finished compost.

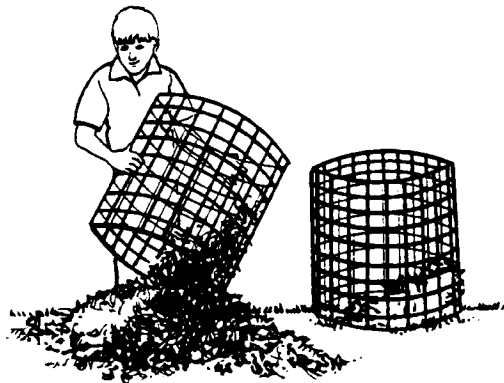
What You Need

Materials

- 12 1/2 feet of 36-inch-wide 1-inch mesh galvanized chicken wire or 1/2-inch mesh hardware cloth
- heavy wire for ties
- 3 or 4 wooden or metal posts (for chicken wire bin) 4 feet tall

Tools

- heavy-duty wire or tin snips
- pliers
- hammer (for chicken wire bin)
- metal file (for hardware cloth bin)
- work gloves



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Pub. 2610-G (5M)

1/98 Rep.

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Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of Congress of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the United States Department of Agriculture. The Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service provides equal opportunities in programs and employment.

Adapted from Cornell Cooperative Extension GPAE90712

Building a Wire Mesh Bin

If using chicken wire:

1. Fold 3 to 4 inches of wire at each end of the cut piece to provide a strong, clean edge that won't poke or snag and 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. Using pliers, attach the ends of the chicken wire together with the wire ties.
4. Space wooden or metal posts around the inside of the chicken wire circle. Holding the posts tightly against the wire, pound them firmly into the ground to provide support.

If using hardware cloth:

1. Trim the ends of the hardware cloth so 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. Using pliers, attach the ends of the hardware cloth together with the wire ties.

Adding Wastes

Add wastes as they become available. Non-wood materials such as grass clippings and garden weeds work best. Speed the composting process by chopping or shredding the yard waste before putting it in the bin.

Maintaining Compost

As waste is added to the wire mesh bin, the material at the bottom will compost sooner than the material at the top. If you want to use the compost at the bottom of the pile, you can remove the wire holding unit and place it next to the pile. Then, use a pitchfork to move the compost back into the moved holding unit, adding the material from the top of the pile first. Continue until you have replaced all the compost. Now the compost at the top of the bin is ready to use.

You also can scoop finished compost from the bottom of the pile by lifting one side of the unit. For best results, turn the pile to mix, aerate and add moisture if needed during dry spells. Compost should be finished in about a year if it's not turned or in 4 months if managed and turned regularly.

