

Organic Waste



Indigenous Wisdom

“Mother Earth teach me acceptance, as the leaves that die each fall. Mother Earth, teach me renewal, as the seed that rises in the spring.”

–Ute Prayer



Background

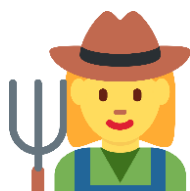
Organic waste is waste that can be broken down by microorganisms, and other living organisms, through composting or other natural methods. Most organic waste is food waste – food that is produced, not eaten and thrown away.



- 40% of household waste destined for landfills in Canada is actually organic matter. This amount could be dramatically reduced through a reduction in consumption or through better diversion of organic waste.
- More than a third of food produced and distributed in Canada is never eaten. 63% of the food Canadians throw away was perfectly edible.

Contributors to Organic Waste

Food retailers, restaurants, and households all have many wasteful practices that contribute to organic waste. Often, organic waste is not properly disposed of in compost bins and sent to landfills.



- Farmers do not send imperfect-looking but perfectly edible fruits and vegetables to food retailers because stores do not shelve them. This is because these foods are often seen as undesirable to consumers.
- Food waste happens in restaurants when: food is prepared but not served; there is a surplus of ingredients but not all are used; and there is inadequate storage available for foods.
- In households, food waste is driven by over-purchasing of food, poor food storage, and a sense of apathy or lack of concern about wasted food.

Environmental Impacts of Organic Waste

- Organic waste that ends up in landfills does not decompose naturally. Instead, organic waste turns into methane (CH₄), which is a **greenhouse gas** 25 times more damaging to the environment than CO₂. Every year, food waste in Canada creates 56.6 million tonnes of CO₂ equivalent emissions, acting as a major contributor to the **climate crisis**.
- Organic waste also releases liquid leachate, which is a compound that leads to the contamination of water supplies.



Social Impacts of Organic Waste

Although we waste millions of tonnes of food in Canada, there are many communities across the country that face food insecurity, which is the lack of physical or economic access to healthy, affordable, nutritious foods.

Globally, while developed nations discard over a third of food produced, millions suffer from severe hunger and malnourishment.

- Experts believe that if we cut back our food waste by 25%, we can feed everyone that is hungry in the world.
- Reducing food waste will ease the global burden on resources as our global population expands and food production needs to increase to feed everyone.



Glossary

Greenhouse gas (GHGs). A greenhouse gas is any gaseous compound that is present in the atmosphere, which is capable of absorbing infrared radiation. By absorbing infrared radiation, these gaseous compounds trap and hold heat in the atmosphere causing the warming of outside temperatures. Examples of GHGs are carbon dioxide (CO₂) and methane (CH₄).

Climate crisis. It describes the urgent situation of human caused climate change, caused by greenhouse gas emissions from human activity.



Learn More and Take Action

Learn about everyday steps you can take to reduce your organic waste:

- **Environmental Protection Agency's Guide on Reducing Food Waste at Home** (<https://www.epa.gov/recycle/reducing-wasted-food-home>)

Follow, support, and volunteer at Canadian organizations that are reducing organic waste:

- **Zero Waste Canada** (<https://zerowastecanada.ca/>)
- **Second Harvest** (<https://secondharvest.ca/>)
- **Rescue Food Canada** (<https://rescuefood.ca/>)
- **Feed It Forward Canada** (<https://feeditforward.ca/>)



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