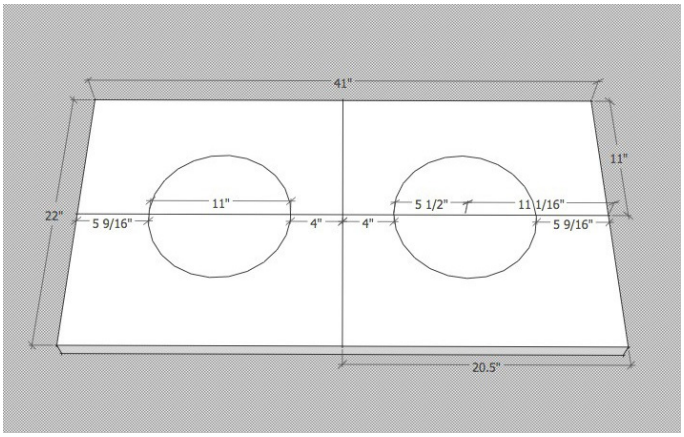
How to Build a Compost Cart:
A School How To Guide

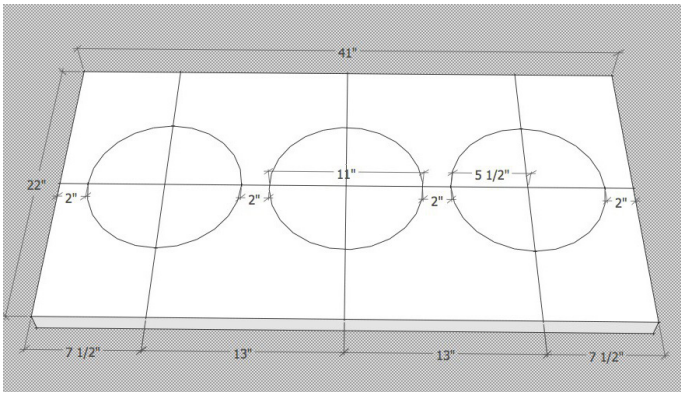
A compost cart is a great station for schools or businesses that are composting and more than a few people are contributing to the compost buckets. The countertop contains messes and as a station on wheels it is easy to transport food scraps to larger totes or compost bins. The best location for a compost cart is after the trash and recycling cans. That way all of the non-biodegradable material has already been removed from the plates or trays and food scraps are the last thing dumped before the plates are washed.

The most dependable cart is GroundWork Garden Utility Cart (800lb capacity), which can be found at Tractor Supply for $80 with a $25 assembly fee. You will be creating a plywood countertop for this cart with 2 or 3 holes cut out for buckets, depending on how much material is produced. For a school, if there are more than 250 students, then design the cart to hold three buckets.

Materials:

- ¾” plywood
- Table saw or circular saw (to cut plywood to size)
- Jigsaw (to cut circular holes)
- Drill
- 1/8” Drill bit
- 1/2” Drill bit
- Driver bit (that fits screws)
- 1 ¼” Screws (8)
- Architectural compass (or makeshift compass—see details below)
- Pencil
- Measuring tape
- Straight edge
- Sander
- Wood glue
- Paint (oil based, outdoor paint)





Top Figure (1): Measurements for Compost Cart with 2 Buckets. Bottom Figure (2): Measurements for Compost Cart with 3 Buckets.

Building Instructions

1. All measurements are outlined in the figures on page 1. Start with a 3/4“ sheet of plywood. Double check measurements of the top of the cart, but if using the GroundWork garden cart, cut the plywood to 41” x 22”. You want the plywood to overhang the cart sides. Use the table saw if you have one, or the circular saw. Once it’s cut to size, find the midpoints on both sides of the cart and draw light lines in pencil to find the midpoint of the rectangle.

2. Use Figures 1 and 2 to determine measurements to find either the outer edge or the midpoints of the circles. The two circular cut outs will be 5 ½” in radius or 11” in diameter.

3. Since buckets taper, you can’t simply draw a circle using a bucket as the template. Instead, use a compass or make your own compass (see directions below).

4. Once you have measurements laid out, you can begin to cut out the circles. Start by drilling a hole with a 1/2” bit on the outer edge of the circles. This will provide the hole you need to start using the jigsaw. Slowly use the jigsaw to cut out the circles.

5. Round all edges to get rid of sharp corners. A simple way to do this is to use a glass bottle to outline a half circle on each corner. Also use the bottle to make a place for the cart handle to sit. See figures 3 and 4 below.

6. Cut two strips of scrap plywood around 36 ½” long and 1” wide. These will get screwed to the bottom of the countertop to keep it from moving around on the cart.

7. Pre-drill 4 holes in each of the strips, one on each end and two evenly dispersed between those. Measure the distance between the inside of the cart sides, and find the location where the strips need to be. It should be about 2” from the ends and 1 ½” from the long edges. See figure 5 below.

8. Lay a thin line of wood glue on the strips and lay down on the plywood. Drill four screws into pre-drilled holes on the strip and repeat for the other strip.

9. Let glue dry and then paint the entire thing, including the bottom, the strips and the edges. This will protect the cart from weathering. Cover everything with one coat, and put a second coat on the top of the countertop.

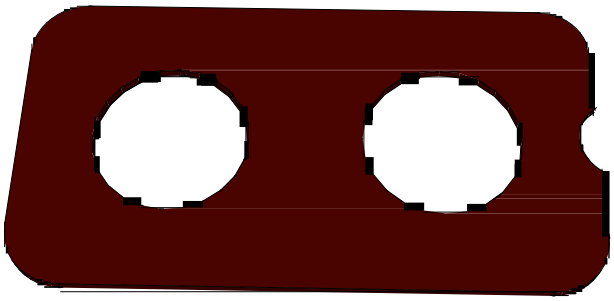


Figure 3: Finished 2 Bucket Countertop

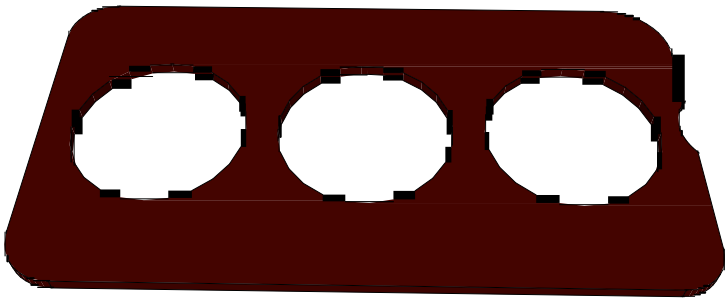


Figure 4: Finished 3 Bucket Countertop

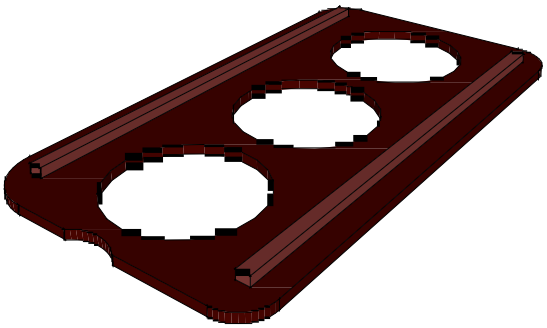


Figure 5: Strips on the Underside of the cart countertop

This resource uses or is adapted from content originally developed by the Highfields Center for Composting in Hardwick VT. The Highfields Center for Composting dissolved as an organization in December 2014 and ended its active involvement in the Close the Loop Program.

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