Compost Basics: It’s Recycling

Composting turns food and yard materials into a natural amendment for the soil. Compost is a valuable resource that is easy to make in your own backyard.

1. Collect Materials to Compost
   Composting needs both:
   “Green” nitrogen-rich materials and
   “Brown” carbon-rich materials.
   GOOD TO ADD TO COMPOST
   “Greens”
   - Vegetables
   - Fruits
   - Fresh grass clippings
   - Green leaves
   - Fresh garden/yard debris
   - Coffee grounds
   - Tea bags
   - Manure (plant eaters only)
   “Browns”
   - Brown leaves
   - Old grass clippings
   - Old garden/yard debris
   - Straw
   - Paper, cardboard
   - Sawdust (untreated-small amount)
   DO NOT ADD TO COMPOST
   - Meat and bones
   - Fats, oils, grease
   - Dairy products
   - Pet or human waste
   - Whole branches
   - Charcoal ash

2. Pile it in a Compost Bin
   A compost bin stores the green and brown materials while they decompose into compost. Alternate layers of browns and greens at a ratio of 3:1. Water each layer. Top layer should always be brown.

3. Turn the Pile and Add Water
   Helpful bacteria and fungi break down materials into compost. To survive, they need:
   - Food: Feed them balanced green and brown materials.
   - Water: Keep the pile as damp as a wrung out sponge
   - Oxygen: Turn the pile to provide more air circulation. (see “Hot or Cool?” box on other side)

4. Harvest your Compost!
   Depending on your pile, it can take 3 months to 2 years for compost to be made. Finished compost is dark brown, crumbly, and smells like earth.

Add compost to give your garden, lawn, and potting soil a boost.

FIND MORE COMPOSTING INFO AND PRINTABLE GUIDES ONLINE AT

RECYCLINGCONNECTIONS.ORG
**Compost: A Living System**

Microbes are the workers of your compost pile. Keep the bacteria and fungi happy and they will work to make compost faster.

**Troubleshooting**

**Too Dry**

Q: How do I know?
A: Crackles to touch. Keep your pile as damp as a wrung out sponge.

**Too Mois**t

Q: How do I know?
A: It may be smelly and attracting bugs. Turn pile, add more browns/carbon sources to absorb excess moisture and allow oxygen to circulate. Remember 3 parts brown to 1 part green.

**Compost Uses**

- **Mulch:** Add 2-3 inches to top of soil around plants, trees, and shrubs. Reduces weeds and retains moisture.
- **Soil Amendment:** Dig 1-2 inches into top 4-6 inches of soil. Improves soil structure, retains moisture and adds nutrients.
- **Potting Mix:** Add 25% compost. Stores moisture and provides nutrients.
- **“Compost Tea”:** Steep bag of compost in water, aerate, and spray on plants. High dose of nutrients.
- **Lawn Top Dressing:** Screen to 1/2 inch. Spread over lawn. Brings soil to life.

**Benefits of Composting**

- Improves soil health
- Reduces water needs
- Saves money
- Reduces fertilizer and pesticide use
- Slows erosion
- Suppresses some plant diseases
- Reduces taxes by cutting transportation and handling costs. Manage at the source.

**Hot or Cool?**

**Hot Pile**

Build all at once as a batch, watering each layer. Microbes will multiply. Pile heats up to 132-140°F. Turn weekly so each part of pile gets hot and kills weeds, seeds, and most diseases. Produces compost in 6-12 weeks.

**Cool Pile**

Build as you get materials. Top layer is always browns. Turn and water when you can. Produces compost in 12-24 months.

Don't add noxious weeds, seeds, or diseased plants. Stockpile some fall leaves so they are available in summer to combine with the greens when carbon sources are harder to find.

Our gardens are enriched with compost made here every year.