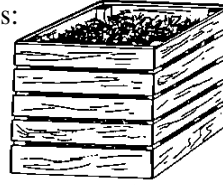


How to make *Healthy Compost*

Successful Composting

A compost pile is home to a living, growing community of organisms. These factors contribute to the success of the composting process:



1. TEMPERATURE

Bacteria in a compost pile create heat as they work and grow. The best temperature for speedy composting is about 140° at the center of the pile. To maintain good temperatures, an ideal compost pile should be at least 3'x3'x3'. You can start a small pile and build as you go.

Check the center of your pile - is it hot?

2. OXYGEN

Aerobic, "oxygen-loving" organisms work quickly and without odors. If a compost pile does not have enough air, anaerobic organisms will take over and odors will develop. Encourage aerobic decomposition by turning the pile whenever you add materials. Mix in dry leaves or straw to discourage matting down or compression.

Odor? Turn pile to add oxygen.

3. MOISTURE

All organisms, including those in a compost pile, need water for growth. A dry compost pile will decompose slowly. If it is too wet, the oxygen supply will be limited, and anaerobic decomposition could occur. You may need to add water or dry materials after dry or wet spells of weather.

Do the "Squeeze Test" - composting materials should be about as moist as a wrung-out sponge.

4. FOOD

The creatures that do the work of decomposition view our waste as their food. Microscopic organisms need a mixture of carbon and nitrogen to grow and reproduce. **Generally, "green" or wet materials are high in nitrogen (decompose rapidly), while "brown", dry or woody materials are high in carbon (break down slowly).**

Green (wet) Nitrogen-rich

grass clippings	kitchen wastes
fruit wastes	rotted manures
alfalfa hay	fresh garden-clippings

Brown (dry) Carbon-rich

leaves	straw
cornstalks	sawdust
	dried garden-clippings

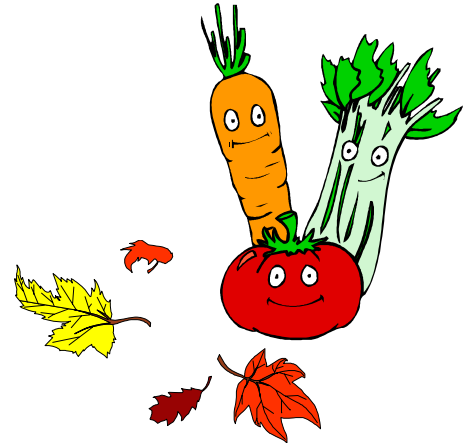
Preparing Materials

- ◆ Chop up stalks, vines, large twigs, straw or hay.
- ◆ Run the lawnmower over leaves to reduce their size.
- ◆ Remove litter from yard waste.

When is Compost "Finished"?

Finished compost is a brown, crumbly, earthy-smelling, soil-like material. It takes between six months and one year for a pile to yield a finished product, depending on how much attention it is given. You should not be able to recognize the waste materials that went into the pile.

- ◆ Screen before use for finer compost.
- ◆ Put undecomposed materials back into the pile to break down further.



How to Use Finished Compost

- ◆ Work it directly into garden soil (improves structure, adds nutrients).
- ◆ Sprinkle it on the lawn to keep it green without much water.
- ◆ Apply it around trees to feed the roots and reduce water needs.
- ◆ Apply it directly to the garden a few times a year as a mulch.
- ◆ Mix with potting soil for indoor gardening needs.

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DO COMPOST

DO NOT COMPOST

Food Waste

coffee/tea bags
vegetable scraps
fruit scraps
egg shells
rice/grains/pasta

Yard Waste

leaves
grass clippings
garden trimmings

Other

pine needles
(small amounts)
wood ash (small
amounts)
manures (horse,
cow, goat,
chicken, rabbit)

meat or fish scraps
pet wastes or kitty litter
diseased plants

cheese or other dairy products
charcoal briquettes
weeds which spread by roots and runners
bulky woody waste
fat or greasy wastes
insect-ridden plants
weeds with seeds
peanut butter, oils

COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What should I do with grass clippings?

Keep your lawn healthy by leaving grass clippings right on the lawn. If you collect and compost grass clippings, mix them well with a bulky "brown" material to keep them from becoming compacted and smelly.



What should I do with leaves that don't fit in my bin?

To decrease the volume of leaves, run the lawn mower over them before adding them to the pile, or wet them down and cover with a tarp to keep them from blowing away. Add them to your compost bin throughout the year to cover food waste or to provide "brown" materials for your composting recipe. Leaves and yard waste (not food waste) can easily be composted in a pile without using a bin.

Can I compost through the winter?

Although the process will slow down in cold weather, some bacteria activity will continue. Food waste can still be added as long as it is covered each time with leaves or straw. You can further insulate your pile by covering it with thick, dark plastic.

Should I add...

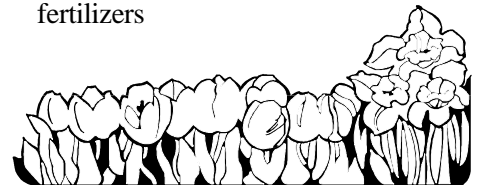
lime? It is not necessary (and can sometimes cause problems) to add lime to adjust the acidity of a compost pile.

pine needles? Pine needles have a high acid content and are good to use as mulch on acid-loving plants such as strawberries or rhododendrons. Pine needles take a long time to fully compost. No more than 10% of a pile should be pine needles at one time.

wood ashes? Use wood ashes cautiously; they have a high alkaline level. However, they do provide potash, a valuable nutrient for your garden. Add ashes to your compost pile in small quantities - no more than a quarter of an inch at a time.

THE BENEFITS OF COMPOST

- 👉 increases the organic matter in soil and helps build sound root structure
- 👉 balances the pH of the soil
- 👉 makes nutrients in soil more readily available to plants
- 👉 attracts earthworms, considered the "earth's greatest recyclers"
- 👉 makes clay soils airy so that they can drain better
- 👉 improves the ability of sandy soils to hold moisture and resist erosion
- 👉 raises the vitamin and mineral content of food grown in a compost-rich garden
- 👉 reduces reliance on petroleum-based fertilizers



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