

COMPOSTING 101

What is composting?

Composting is the controlled aerobic decomposition of raw organic materials (such as food scraps and dry leaves) via fungi, bacteria, and other microbes in order to create **compost**, a dark, crumbly, earthy-smelling soil amendment.

What are its benefits?

	Reduces waste	Wasted food is the largest single component of everyday garbage. Composting food scraps and yard trimmings diverts waste from polluting landfills and incinerators.
	Enhances soil	Applied to soil, compost enhances soil organic matter, structure, fertility, microbial activity, water holding capacity, and ability to resist plant diseases.
	Protects the climate	Landfills and incinerators emit potent greenhouse gases. But compost added to soils helps sequester carbon, while offsetting fossil-fuel-intensive fertilizers. Healthy soils are an important carbon sink.
	Grows community	Community composting encourages people to engage with each other while learning how their food is grown. Commercial sites sustain 4-8 times more jobs per ton than landfills and incinerators.

✓ **Materials that can be composted:** ✗ **Materials to avoid:**

GREENS		BROWNS			
	FRUIT & VEGETABLE SCRAPS (No stickers)		FALL LEAVES		MEAT, FISH, OR BONES
	EGG SHELLS		PLANT STALKS (6" or smaller)		EGGS OR DAIRY PRODUCTS
	COFFEE GROUNDS & PAPER FILTERS		WOOD CHIPS & SHAVINGS (Not chemically treated)		PRODUCE STICKERS
	TEA BAGS (No staples or plastic)		SHREDDED NEWSPAPER & BROWN BAGS (No glossy pages)		GLOSSY PAPER
	GARDEN TRIMMINGS (6" or smaller)				DISEASED AND PEST-INFESTED PLANTS
					WEEDS WITH SEEDS
					"COMPOSTABLE" TABLEWARE & PLASTIC BAGS
					FATS, OILS, OR GREASE
					COOKED FOOD
					PET WASTE & KITTY LITTER
					TREATED OR PAINTED WOOD
					HERBICIDE-TREATED PLANTS
					DRYER LINT
					USED TISSUES

COMMON STEPS IN COMPOSTING

1

Determine composting material collection and storage

- Browns should be stored and readily available at all times



Greens should NOT be stored on site. When they decompose alone they will create odor problems.



2

Chop up large materials as needed

- Increasing surface area helps materials break down faster
- Chop tough food scraps and garden trimmings (such as corn cobs, pineapple tops, broccoli stalks, vines, and long stalks)
- Do NOT cut avocado or mango pits! They will eventually break down



2 to 6 inches is ideal

3

Build and add to compost pile • Check recipe

- When determining the recipe, consider: What materials will be used? How much of each is available? What is the system's capacity?
- For stationary piles, start with a 6-inch base of browns and looser material to create air flow.
- To get proportions right, measure materials with the same volume wheelbarrow or container
- Remember the basic recipe: at least 2 parts browns to 1 part greens by volume (online compost recipe calculators can help)
- Pay attention to air flow, moisture level, and ratio of greens to browns in the pile
- During the active composting stage, continue adding greens until the bin/chamber/pile is full

**Lasagna method:
layer greens and
browns**



**Make a small hole
in the pile, add greens,
then cover with browns**



**Mix greens and
browns separately,
then add to the pile**



Moisture Tip:

Use the "Hand Squeeze" moisture test



The ideal moisture level feels a wrung-out sponge



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Troubleshoot as needed

Critters	Odor	Moisture
▶ Cover exposed food scraps with a thick layer of browns ▶ Make sure there is no meat, dairy, fats/oil, or cooked food in the pile ▶ Maintain at least 3 feet of open space all around the system (avoid clutter and trim vegetation) to eliminate potential rodent hiding places ▶ Turn piles thoroughly and regularly to discourage rodents from creating a habitat ▶ Add a barrier (such as gravel or hardware cloth) at the base of bin systems	▶ Adjust recipe ▶ Add more browns ▶ Check moisture ▶ Check bulk density (could be too dense) ▶ Mix to aerate ▶ Cover greens with dry browns	Too Wet ▶ Turn pile ▶ Add more dry browns Too Dry ▶ Add water throughout the pile

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Cure

- Start curing (process by which compost finishes) when pile no longer heats up after mixing and food scraps are no longer visible
- Either move old compost to new bin/chamber to cure or stop adding to the system altogether to allow the entire pile to cure
- Allow pile to cure for generally 2 to 9 months (minimum 4 weeks)
- By the end, the composted materials will have shrunk to about one-third of their original volume

