

Composting Basics

Compost is organic matter that has been decomposed and recycled as a fertilizer and soil enhancement. Composting fuels plant growth, restores vitality to depleted soil, and is a key ingredient in organic farming.



A balance of Carbon, Nitrogen, Air and Water is needed to make compost.

- **Carbon or Brown Material:**

Brown, dry yard and garden materials provide the carbon balance for your pile. The smaller the pieces, the faster the compost.

Examples: grass clippings, leaves, twigs, hay, flowers, vacuum dirt, pine needles, and weeds that have not gone to seed. Woody branches should be chipped.

- **Nitrogen or Green Material:**

Green materials provide the nitrogen to the pile. Always bury food scraps deep inside the pile to avoid potential odors or pest problems.

Examples: vegetable and fruit waste, coffee grounds w/filter, tea bags, egg shells, hair, fresh grass clippings, chicken/horse/rabbit/cow manures.

- **Air** is essential for Aerobic Composting. Turn your pile with a compost turning tool or garden fork or use holey pipes, bundles of bamboo/corn stalks, and woody branches to add air pockets in your pile. Bacteria, fungus and insects that live in your compost need oxygen to work. Sufficient oxygen keeps your pile sweet smelling.

- **Water:** Keep your pile as damp as a wrung out sponge. Compost piles need about 50% moisture. Dampen layers when building the pile then add water through perforated pipes or a jet of water. Keep a cover on open piles during hot, dry weather or rainy weather.

Build Your Pile by alternating equal weights of Carbon, Nitrogen. Adding a layer of finished compost or dirt will introduce bacteria to the pile. Check weekly. If you turn your compost, it will be finished in about two months. If not, about 6 months



Using your compost (Location/Application)

- **Garden:** Work into Soil. Use as a top dressing alone or with other mulching or natural fertilizer material.
- **Lawn:** Sprinkle sifted compost over lawn before watering or rainfall. Also helps suppress lawn diseases.
- **Shrubs, Hedges & Fruit Trees:** Scatter at the driplines (not against the trunks) as a nutrient-rich mulch.
- **Houseplants:** Steep a couple of tablespoons in a quart of hot water and use as a mild fertilizer (compost tea). Spread compost at the base of plants as a mulch. When potting plants, replace 1/8 to 1/4 of the potting soil with compost.

Compost friendly foods include:

- Vegetable and fruit wastes, (including peels, rinds and cores)
- Old bread, donuts, cookies, crackers, pizza crust, noodles
- Grains (cooked or uncooked): rice, barley
- Coffee grounds, tea bags, filters
- Fruit or vegetable pulp from juicing
- Old spices
- Outdated boxed foods from the pantry
- Egg shells (crush well)
- Corn cobs and husks (cobs breakdown very slowly)
- Grass clippings, leaves & weeds



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