

STARTING A COMPOST PILE

Compost is simply decomposing organic matter and while it may seem like a complex or magical experiment, composting is a natural and extremely easy process. Starting a compost pile is a great way to recycle kitchen and yard waste while producing a nutritious super food for your garden.

Building a structure. A compost pile can be as simple or as extravagant as you choose. You can simply pile up the compost in a corner of the yard, but many gardeners prefer to use some kind of enclosure. This can be due to personal preference, or city and local restrictions and guidelines. Chicken wire, wood timbers or blocks can be used to construct an enclosure, but keep in mind how you will get the finished compost out. You might want to leave one side open. There are premade compost bins readily available now, both tumbling and stationary. They can be expensive but do make a more attractive option.

What to compost. The list of things that can't be composted is much smaller than of things that can. Most yard, garden and kitchen waste is usable.

MATERIALS TO COMPOST

Browns = High Carbon	Greens = High Nitrogen
Ashes, wood	Alfalfa
Bark	Algae
Cardboard, Shredded	Clover
Corn stalks	Coffee grounds
Fruit waste	Food waste
Leaves	Garden waste
Newspaper, shredded	Grass clippings
Peanut Shells	Hay
Peat moss	Hedge clippings
Pine needles	Hops, used
Sawdust	Manures
Stems and twigs, shredded	Seaweed
Straw	Vegetable scraps
Vegetable stalks	Weeds*

*Avoid weeds that have gone to seed, as seeds may survive all but the hottest compost piles.

Do not compost. Meats, fats, grease, oils, bones, diseased plants (never compost roses), colored paper, ashes (coal or charcoal), cat or dog waste, toxic materials, or inorganic materials.



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Making compost is as simple as combining the correct ratio of carbon (brown) and nitrogen (green). Start with a layer of twigs and sticks and then start alternating layers. If your pile starts to get slimy, you have too much nitrogen (green), add more brown (carbon). If your pile stops breaking down, add more greens(nitrogen).

TIPS TO SPEED UP THE PROCESS.

Turn your pile. Turning your pile increases the oxygen level which makes the bacteria happy. Happy bacteria eat more and help your compost breaks down faster.

Add water. The compost pile should be moist (not wet) to help speed up the process. This is why your pile should be placed within range of a hose.

Add an activator. A compost activator helps to turn on your pile and really get it working at its full potential. You can purchase a ready-made activator or use alfalfa meal, manure, bone meal, blood meal or even dry dog food.

Start more than one pile. It is hard for your pile to efficiently break down when you are constantly adding things to it. Once decomposition has started try not to add anything unless you notice a brown/green ratio problem.

