



How To Make Compost

Like magic, compost can turn kitchen and garden waste into an ideal soil conditioner, rich with nutrients and organisms. While you can purchase compost at any garden center, it's easy to make.

Some people prefer to make compost inside bins. These range from store-bought compost bins and containers to handmade bins using lumber, a chicken wire cylinder, or a large garbage bin with ½-inch holes drilled in the bottom and sides. Online you'll find great videos for building compost bins, plus sites where you can buy bins or kits. However, also you can make a compost heap by sectioning off a space in your backyard.

What You'll Need

Brown Stuff (for carbon)

- *Fallen leaves*
- *Straw or hay*
- *Twigs, sticks and branches*
- *Dead, disease-free flowers and plants*
- *Shredded non-gloss paper*
- *Cardboard (torn in strips)*
- *Shredded newspaper*

Green Stuff (for nitrogen)

- *Raw vegetable/fruit peels and scraps*
- *Plant/shrub prunings*
- *Crushed egg shells*
- *Grass clippings*
- *Pine needles*
- *Coffee grinds/tea leaves*
- *Barnyard animal manure*

Stuff Not to Use

- *Meat or fish scraps*
- *Bones*
- *Dairy products*
- *Cooked foods*
- *Fats or oils*
- *Cat or dog manure*
- *Cat litter*
- *Diapers*
- *Plastic*

What To Do

1. Isolate a space at least 3' x 3' in size with easy access so you can turn compost when needed.
2. Cover the area with a thick layer of carbon-rich "brown" materials including straw, sticks, leaves and newspaper.
3. Top this layer with nitrogen-rich "green" materials like grass and shrub clippings, kitchen peelings, coffee grinds and manure. (The ratio should be three parts brown to one part green.)

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4. Cover the green layer with a thin layer of garden soil.
5. Add a second layer of brown materials, followed by a layer of green materials and a layer of soil.
6. Lightly spray the pile with water.
7. Repeat steps 2-6 until the pile is roughly 3 feet high, and cover with a tarp.
8. In 2-3 days, turn the pile using a pitchfork or shovel to combine the ingredients. After that, turn the pile every week or two, moving the center materials to the outside. (The pile should be hot, and you may see steam escaping. This means the pile is cooking properly.)
9. Keep the pile moist, but do not overwater it. You should notice earthworms throughout the pile.
10. As you turn the pile, inner materials should turn black and become crumbly. When the bulk of the pile has turned dark, the compost is ready for use. (As early as 6-8 weeks, but usually 3-6 months.)

Tips for Success

- *Locate your pile in a space where you want to plant a future garden, tree or shrub. Nutrients from the pile will filter down and enrich the soil naturally. When you're ready to plant, move the pile to a new location.*
- *If you don't have enough materials at first to make a pile 3 feet high, don't worry. Keep adding to the pile weekly, and it will soon reach that height.*
- *To avoid unpleasant odors and pests, never add meat scraps or dairy products to your pile. Keep all food additions covered with brown materials (clippings, straw, etc.).*
- *Add lime to the pile to neutralize odors, and cottonseed meal to hasten cooking.*
- *If the pile seems cool, particularly at the center, it needs to be turned. Turning assures materials continue to decay.*
- *If the pile is soggy or not cooking, make sure you have adequate drainage, and add additional brown materials.*

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