

Home Composting

Compost Hints

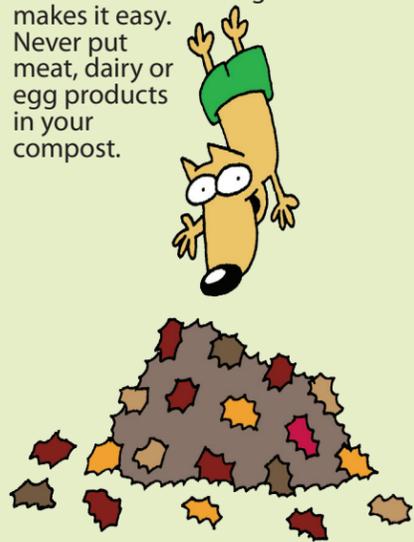
Mulch leaves with your mower or leaf vacuum before composting. The smaller particle size will help decrease the time needed to compost your leaves.

Moisture is crucial to good, rapid composting. You should be able to squeeze a drop of water from a handful of materials.

Oxygen makes the whole thing work. Composting is a biological process that requires water and oxygen. Turn or fluff your compost once a week or so, especially during warmer months, to make certain the center of the pile gets enough air.

Combine your materials together to provide a good mix. A pile of leaves only has too much carbon and too little nitrogen. Compost experts recommend a mixture of high carbon items (leaves) and high nitrogen item (grass, coffee grounds, veg. scraps). If you're low on grass clippings you can also use a small amount of garden fertilizer to provide nitrogen.

Scraps from your kitchen are a great addition to your compost. Keeping a marked, sealed container available for vegetable and fruit scraps and other plant items such as coffee grounds makes it easy. Never put meat, dairy or egg products in your compost.



Getting Started

With wood pallets, cement blocks or galvanized wire, create a round or square bin that fits your landscape & budget. Many Garden centers sell manufactured bins. Three to five feet across allows proper air flow.

Winter

Prepare the pile for colder weather by covering to prevent excessive moisture and freezing of the contents. Large piles can stay active through the winter.

Nature recycles all living things, slowly building and replenishing soil. Composting harnesses Nature's recycling crew to make rich humus from organic waste, concentrating and speeding this natural process.

Working with Mother Nature

The History

In 1931, Sir Albert Howard published, "The Waste Products of Agriculture." His composting method spread rapidly around the world. Composting has become a big part of organic gardening, lawn care and an important way to reduce waste.

Spring

Warmer weather brings new green matter to join the brown of the Fall. Clean the yard and rebuild the pile. The pile should get hot and shrink in volume.

Air flow through the pile is vital for rapid, odorless decomposition.

Earthworms, sowbugs, millipedes
Bacteria

Add water. Success of the pile depends upon adequate moisture.

Summer

Mix grass and available brown matter throughout the summer. Water as necessary to maintain moisture. Add vegetable & fruit scraps.

Harvest the finished compost at the bottom of the pile in early fall; screen to remove undigested material (return that material to the new pile). Store the compost or apply to your garden or lawn.

By mixing greens and browns, adding moisture and mass, ideal conditions are created for bacteria and fungi. The pile heats and rapid decomposition follows. Mites and beetles eat the bacteria; earthworms, sowbugs and millipedes complete the transformation back to humus.

How It Works

Fall

Start the pile over again with mowed, shredded leaves and the last of the grass clippings.

Compost Biology

Bacteria work at different temperatures to break down the organic matter to produce humus, or compost.

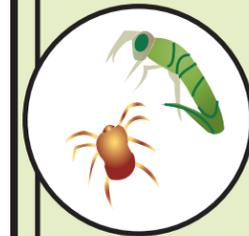


Thermophiles take over as the pile gets hotter (113-170 degrees F.) They are the workhorses, breaking down protein, fats and complex carbohydrates and killing weed seeds. Fastest decomposition occurs between 130 and 150 degrees.

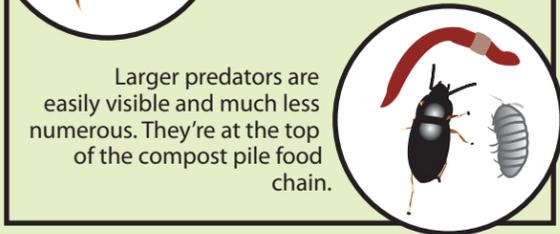
Mesophilic bacteria grow between 68 and 113 degrees. At these temperatures the pile takes a long time to decompose.

Psychrophilic bacteria live at temperatures from 14 to 59 degrees Fahrenheit. Decomposition slows at low temperatures. That's why we refrigerate food.

Bacteria do the major work. Warm wet conditions with a mixture of browns and greens set the stage for a bacteria banquet, as the populations explode to astronomical numbers.



First level predators feed on the single-cell bacteria. Some are also microscopic, others are just visible to the naked eye.



Larger predators are easily visible and much less numerous. They're at the top of the compost pile food chain.

Benefits of Compost

- 1 Adds vigor to your lawn and garden.
- 2 Retains moisture, resists drought.
- 3 Helps loosen heavy clay soils.
- 4 Increases living organisms in the soil.
- 5 Adds nutrients and conditions the soil.
- 6 Keeps methane-producing organic materials out of landfills.