

**REDUCE**

**REUSE**

**RECYCLE**



## Keys to successful home composting

**Organic materials:** A good mix consists of three parts "browns" (materials such as dead leaves that are high in carbon) and one part "greens" (such as fresh grass clippings and garden prunings that are high in nitrogen).

**Moisture:** Composting materials should feel moist but not overly soggy.

**Temperature:** Compost should feel warm to the touch except in the cold winter months.

**Air:** To prevent unpleasant odors that can occur when materials decompose without oxygen, compost should be turned regularly to ensure that air is reaching the center of the pile.

High Carbon "Browns"	High Nitrogen "Greens"	Sources of Composting Organisms
Leaves Dead Plants Straw Shredded Paper Shredded Twigs Pine Needles Sawdust from Untreated Wood	Grass Green Plant Clippings Manure Alfalfa or Clover Seaweed or Pond Algae Non-Meat and Non-Dairy kitchen scraps	Old Compost Soil Cow Manure Chicken Manure Horse Manure Commercially available Compost Starters

### Getting Started

A 4 x 4 x 4-foot area out of direct sunlight is ideal for your compost pile. Choose an easily accessible spot on a grass or soil base. Composting can begin any time of the year, but many people start in the fall when leaves are abundant.

Organic materials should be mixed, adding water as needed so that the materials feel like a moist, wrung-out sponge. The compost pile should be turned after a few weeks so that the outside layers are exchanged with the center of the pile. Turn compost piles about once a month, except in cold winter conditions. Water can be added during turning, if necessary.



# Fine Tuning Compost

Problem	Solution
Compost is too wet and soggy	Turn and add dry material; cover compost
Compost is dry and appears dusty	Turn and water; shade compost
Compost is cool to the touch	Turn and add high nitrogen "green" materials

## Don't compost:

- Diseased plants or leaves
- Persistent weeds (blackberries, multiflora rose canes, bindweed, quackgrass, etc. )
- Human or pet feces.
- Meat, dairy products and kitchen vegetables cooked with animal fats.
- Plants that have gone to seed.

## Brush and Woody Waste

Trimnings from bushes and shrubs are usually not suitable for composting. Home chippers can be used to grind small branches and prunings for mulch, ornamental landscaping or garden pathways. Old Christmas trees and similar brush may also be left in a secluded part of your yard to attract birds and serve as a natural wildlife habitat.

## Using Compost

Compost is ready to be used when it looks dark and crumbly and none of the starting ingredients are visible. One way to test if your compost is finished is to seal a small sample in a plastic bag for 24 to 48 hours. If no strong odors are released when you open the bag, the compost is done.

Compost can be applied directly around the base of trees and shrubs to serve as a mulch. It also can be worked into the top six to eight inches of the soil to provide increased water retention and valuable nutrients.



**Master Recycler Composter Program**

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