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Making compost for the home garden Fact Sheet

All living things do naturally compost. If you do nothing but pile up organic matter it will compost over time. If you follow these ideas it might happen more quickly!

There are two types of composting: cold and hot. Cold composting is as simple as collecting yard waste or taking out the organic materials in your rubbish (such as fruit and vegetable peels, coffee grounds and filters, and eggshells) and then corralling them in a pile or bin. Over the course of a year or so, the material will decompose.

Hot composting is for the more serious gardener, and you get compost in one to three months during warm weather. Four ingredients are required for fast-cooking hot compost: nitrogen, carbon, air, and water. Together, these items feed microorganisms, which speed up the process of decay.

How to Create and Use Hot Compost



To create your own organic hot-compost heap, wait until you have enough materials to make a pile at least .9 m or 3 feet deep. Then, to ensure an even composition of materials, create alternating 4- to 8-inch-deep layers of green materials (kitchen scraps, fresh leaves, coffee grounds) and brown materials (dried leaves, shredded paper, untreated sawdust).

Sprinkle water over the pile regularly so it has the consistency of a damp sponge. Don't add too much water -- otherwise the microorganisms in your pile will

become waterlogged and drown. If this happens, your pile will rot instead of compost.

Check to see if your pile is decomposing by monitoring temperature. Check the temperature of the pile with a thermometer, or simply reach into the middle of the pile with your hand. If it is warm or hot inside then you are on the right track. During the growing season, you should provide the pile with oxygen by turning it once a week with a garden fork. The best time to turn the compost is when the center of the pile feels warm or the thermometer reads between 45 and 65C. Stirring up the pile helps it cook faster and prevents material from becoming matted down and developing a bad odour. At this point, the layers have served their purpose of creating equal amounts of green and brown materials throughout the pile, so stir thoroughly. When the compost no longer gives off heat and becomes dry, brown, and crumbly, it's fully cooked and ready to feed to the garden.



Materials to use in your compost heap

| Good green materials | Good brown materials | Not to be used! |
|---------------------------|------------------------------------|---|
| Fruit scraps | Finely chopped wood and bark chips | Anything containing meat, oil, fat, or grease |
| Vegetable scraps | Shredded newspaper | Diseased plant materials |
| Eggshells | Straw | Sawdust or chips from pressure-treated wood |
| Coffee grounds | Sawdust from untreated wood | Dog or cat feces |
| Grass and plant clippings | | Weeds that go to seed |
| Grass cuttings | | Dairy products |
| Animal manures# | | |

Cow, horse, goat, chicken, sheep, llama, etc

Carbon to Nitrogen ratio



To speed up composting getting the ratio of brown to green materials (Carbon to Nitrogen) right is important. In general

- Lower C : N ratio = faster decomposition
- Aim for about 30 C : N
- Use table to work out right blend of ingredients if you really want to
- Leaves : weeds : poultry manure
- 1: 1 :1 by weight is about right

This table provides examples of good Carbon to Nitrogen ratios

| Material | Ratio |
|--|-------------|
| Lawn clippings : sawdust | 12:1 |
| Lawn clippings : weeds : leaves | 2:3:1 |
| Leaves : sawdust : cattle manure | 2:1:2.5 |
| Fruit wastes : lawn clippings | 2:1.5 |
| Weeds : paper : chicken manure | 4:3:1 |
| Leaves : weeds : paper : chicken manure : urea | 3:3:1:0.5:1 |

Some good composting systems available to purchase

Compost tumbler – bigger is better as the small ones tend not to generate enough heat to compost properly



Compost bins – again bigger is better and sit on soil for best results.



Aerobin – excellent but expensive system. Do not need to turn and does generate compost tea.



Worm Farms – produce excellent compost/fertiliser and relatively easy to maintain.

