

How Do I Compost?

There are two parts to good compost: **greens** and **browns**.

✓ **Greens** contain a lot of nitrogen and consist of grass, vegetable & fruit peelings, eggshells, plant or yard trimmings, coffee grounds and tea bags. Nitrogen provides necessary protein, but too much nitrogen may produce a rotten odor.

✓ **Browns** are rich in carbon and include leaves, hay, straw, sawdust, woodchips, napkins, and paper towels. Carbon provides energy for the microbes, but too much carbon will slow the decomposition process.

You can compost either in a pile or in a bin. Choose a location that is fairly level, has good drainage, and that receives approximately equal amounts of sun and shade. It can take anywhere from a couple of months to over a year to get a finished product. The more you manage your pile, the faster the compost will be produced.

✓ Your pile should be damp, but not wet. If many of your materials are wet, try to find some dryer materials, such as leaves or shredded newspaper, to mix in. If the pile starts to dry out, just water it a little with a hose.



Composting material	Good for compost?	Carbon or nitrogen	Explanation
Animal products (meat, dairy, oils)	No	n/a	Can attract rodents and cause a stinky pile.
Ashes	No	n/a	May contain materials bad for plants or suppress composting.
Beverages, kitchen rinse water	Yes	Neutral	Good to moisten the middle of the pile.
Coffee grounds, filters and tea bags	Yes	N	Worms love coffee grounds and coffee filters.
Cornstalks, corn cobs	Yes	C	Best if shredded and mixed well with nitrogen rich materials.
Diseased plants	No	N	If your pile doesn't get hot enough, it might not kill harmful organisms.
Dryer lint	Yes	C	Moistening helps.
Eggshells	Yes	O	Excellent source of calcium. Crushing shells helps.
Hair	Yes	N	Scatter so it isn't in clumps.
Leaves, pine needles and cones	Yes	C	Don't overload the pile. Shredding or crushing may help.
Manure (farm animals)	Yes	N	Mix with carbon rich materials to avoid odor. Use aged manure.
Paper products	Yes	C	Shred and avoid colored ink. Recycle instead if you have a lot.
Pet droppings or feces	No	N	May contain disease organisms.
Sawdust and wood shavings	Yes	C	Avoid treated woods.
Sod	Careful	N	Make sure the pile is hot enough, so grass doesn't continue growing.
Spoiled hay or straw	Yes	C	Good alternative to leaves. Helps with aeration.
Vegetable and fruit trimmings	Yes	N	Chop or break up into small pieces.
Weeds	Careful	N	Dry them out on the pavement, then add later.

Other Tips

- If you are concerned about weed seeds in your compost allow pile to get to 150 F before your first turning.

- Composting through the winter is fine. Just keep adding materials to the pile. Your pile will freeze and there won't be much decomposition going on, but it will heat up again in the spring.

TROUBLESHOOTING

Problems	Possible Causes	Solution
Damp and warm only in the middle of the pile.	Pile could be too small, or cold weather might have slowed composting	Make sure your pile is at least 3 feet high and 3 feet wide. Use a bin, insulate pile, or wait for warmer weather.
Materials aren't decomposing. Pile isn't heating up.	Either not enough nitrogen, oxygen, or moisture	Make sure you have enough nitrogen rich sources like manure, grass clippings or food scraps. Mix up the pile and water it with the hose.
Foul odor	Not enough oxygen, carbon, pile is too wet, or too compacted.	Mix up the pile for aeration. Add coarse, dry, carbon-rich materials like straw, hay or leaves to soak up excess moisture. If smell is too bad, add dry materials on top and wait.
Attracts rodents, flies, or other animals.	Inappropriate materials (like meat, oil, bones), or the food-like material is too close to the surface of the pile.	Bury kitchen scraps near the center of the pile. Don't add inappropriate materials to compost. Switch to a rodent-proof closed bin.
Attracts insects, millipedes, slugs, etc.	This is normal composting, and part of the natural process.	Not a problem.
Fire ant problems.	Pile could be too dry, not hot enough, or has kitchen scraps too close to the surface.	Make sure your pile has a good mix of materials to heat up and keep it moist enough.

What is Composting?

Composting is the process of organic materials decomposing or breaking down.

- Microorganisms, worms and insects eat the organic material and turn it into a nutrient rich soil amendment that can be used to enrich your garden.
- Composting in our back yards speeds up what happens naturally on the ground by creating ideal circumstances for decomposition.
- Our waste provides the bugs, worms, and microorganisms with everything they need to survive: water, air and the right materials to eat.

Why Should I Compost?

Saves you money by:

- Reducing amount to be hauled away.
- Minimizing tax money spent on hauling and landfill costs.
- Providing free fertilizer for gardens or farms.

Helps the environment by:

- Reducing number of trucks on the road to haul trash.
- Decreasing the amount of organic waste unnecessarily taking up space in landfills.
- Diminishing demand for chemical fertilizers
- Improving soil drainage and nutrient holding capacity.
- Growing healthier, more disease resistant plants

Aids the community by:

- Supplying resources for community gardens.
- Providing children with a hands-on learning experience in science and social responsibility.
- Influencing children's long-term behavior towards waste reduction.
- Providing safe fertilizer for playing fields and community spaces.

For more information visit:

<http://www.compostguide.com/>

What if I can't compost in my back yard?

Vermicomposting or worm composting is a process that utilizes red earthworms to decompose organic waste. It can be done inside a home, garage, or on a back porch or patio because it produces no foul odor and requires minimal space.

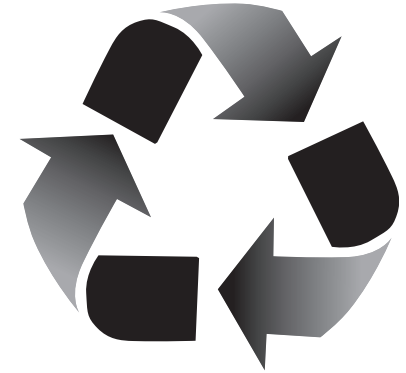
- Red earthworms are purchased and given damp, carbon rich bedding such as shredded newspapers and a shallow, dark, ventilated container to live in.
- A pound of red earthworms consumes about half a pound of non-fatty kitchen scraps each day!
- They produce worm castings, an extremely nutrient rich compost that can be used for potted plants or gardens.
- Worm bins can be purchased online or built out of lidded plastic containers. Directions for construction of your own vermicomposting bin can be found at: www.newfarm.org/features/0804/wormbin/index.shtml
- Red worms can be purchased from lawn and garden catalogues, bait stores or worm farmers. Make sure to buy only red earthworms, which may also be called red wigglers, manure worms, red hybrid or tiger worms. Nightcrawlers or garden worms will die in your worm bin.



Thomas Jefferson
Planning District Commission

PO BOX 1505 • 401 East Water Street
Charlottesville, VA 22902
Tel: (434) 979-7310 • Fax: (434) 979-1597
Email: Info@tjpdcc.org

Closing the Loop:



COMPOSTING



Do your part!

A citizen's quick guide
for home composting

This reference guide provides the information you need to help minimize the waste going to your local landfills to help the environment and save tax dollars on waste disposal.