

# WHAT CAN I COMPOST?

## COMPOST INGREDIENTS

The main ingredients in compost includes “green” and “brown” yard waste. Materials referred to as “green” are high in nitrogen. The “brown” ingredients contain mostly carbon. Compost is created by mixing the “green” and “brown” materials, along with water, air, sunlight, plus decomposing microorganisms and macro organisms.

## GRASS AND LAWN CLIPPINGS

Add grass clippings in very thin layers, or thoroughly mix them in with other compost ingredients. Otherwise, the grass tends to become slimy and matted down, excluding air from the pile. Fresh grass clippings are high in nitrogen, making them a “green” compost ingredient.

## KITCHEN WASTES

Fruit and vegetable peels or rinds, tea bags, coffee grounds, eggshells, and similar materials are great stuff to compost. They tend to be high in nitrogen. This puts them in the “greens” category. Kitchen wastes are usually quite soft and moist. Mix drier and bulkier materials with the kitchen waste to allow complete air penetration. **DO NOT compost meat scraps, fatty food wastes, milk products, or bones - these materials do not compost efficiently and attract pests.**

## LEAVES

Generally, leaves are an excellent compost ingredient. They can mat down and exclude air, so be sure to spread thin layers on the compost pile and break up any clumps of leaves. While most leaves are in the “brown” category, ash and poplar contain abundant nitrogen and are considered “greens”.

## STRAW

Dry straw is a good material for helping to keep a compost pile aerated, because it tends to create lots of passageways for air. Be sure to wet the straw, otherwise it is very slow to decompose. Straw is definitely a “brown” and also requires mixture with “greens” to break down quickly.

## WEEDS AND OTHER GARDEN WASTES

Many types of weeds and garden plants can be composted. Avoid weeds that have begun to go to seed, as seeds may survive all but the hottest compost piles. Some types of weeds are “very aggressive” and will re-sprout in any compost pile. Do not add these to the compost. Newly pulled weeds are a “green” while dead weeds are a “brown”.

## WOODCHIPS AND SAWDUST

Wood products belong in the “browns” category, because they are fairly low in nitrogen. Sawdust breaks down at various rates, depending on the tree source. Stir sawdust thoroughly into the pile or use very thin layers. Coarse wood chips will very slowly decay, and are probably better used as mulch. Do not compost chips or sawdust from any sort of chemically-treated wood. For example, some woods are treated with arsenic which is a toxin.

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## Home Composting



### Reap a heap of benefits

*Composting is a practical and convenient way to handle your yard wastes. It can be easier and cheaper than bagging. Compost also improves your soil and the plants growing in it. If you have a garden, a lawn, trees, shrubs, or planter boxes, you have a use for compost.*

## Don't Bag It

*Mow your lawn often and let the clippings lie.*

# How to compost

Remove grass and sod cover from the area where you will construct your compost pile. This will allow materials direct contact with soil microorganisms and macroorganisms. The following "recipe" for constructing your compost heap is recommended for the best results:

1st layer: 3"-4" of chopped brush or other coarse material on top of the soil surface. This allows air circulation around the base of the heap.

2nd layer: 6"-8" of mixed food scraps, leaves, grass clippings, sawdust, etc. Material should be "sponge damp".

3rd layer: 1" of soil provides necessary microorganisms to the heap.

4th layer: repeat layers until bin is almost full. Top off the heap with a 4"-6" layer of straw and scoop out a basin at the top to catch rain water.

A properly made heap will reach temperatures of 140-160 degrees in four to five days. At this time, you'll notice the pile "settling". This is a good sign your heap is working properly.

After 5-6 weeks, build a new pile, turning the outside of the old pile into the center of the new pile. You should not need to

turn your heap a second time. However, turning more often can reduce the time the compost takes to break down. The compost should be ready to use in three to four months. A heap started in the spring can be ready for use in the autumn; start another heap in autumn for use in the spring.

Compost is ready to use when it is dark brown, crumbly, and smells like earth. Let it stabilize for a few extra days and screen it through a 1/2 inch screen if you want the finest product.

Turn your soil, apply 1"-3" of compost and work it into the soil. Add up to one pound of compost or a heaping double handful, per square foot.

For more information about composting, just visit the web, the Ohio State University Extension Service, or a master gardeners group. There is a wealth of information available that will show many options to create compost.



## Troubleshooting your compost pile

Symptoms	Problem	Solution
The compost has a bad odor.	Not enough air.	Turn it. Add dry material if the pile is too wet.
The center of the pile is dry.	Not enough water.	Moisten and turn the pile.
The compost is damp and warm only in the middle.	Too small.	Collect more material and mix the old ingredients into a new pile. Turn the pile.
The heap is damp and sweet-smelling, but still will not heat up.	Not enough nitrogen.	Mix in a nitrogen source like fresh grass clippings, farmyard manure, composted poultry manure, blood meal or urea fertilizer.