

BACKYARD COMPOSTING

a quick reference for busy composters

FEEDING YOUR COMPOST

How to Feed

- Mix together an equal amount of **greens** and **browns** by volume, then add to your compost pile.
- Collect **greens** in your kitchen in an air-tight container.

NOTE: Ventilated countertop bins with carbon filters seem useful, but they will begin to stink when the filters reach the end of their lifespan!

Changing the Ratios

Use your senses of sight and smell to guide you. A 50-50 ratio of **greens** and **browns** by volume is the simplest way to feed your compost bin, but different compostables have different levels of nitrogen and carbon. If you like, try experimenting with different ratios to maximize your compost output! You can find detailed charts and ratios online or from your local library and agriculture extension programs.

YOUR MANAGEMENT STYLE

With the right environment, composting will happen on its own. You can use the **management tips** below to promote best conditions and maximize your output.

Watering

Like your plants, your compost needs water too! Without it, decomposers can't access the nutrients in compostable materials for digestion.

- Ideally your compost pile contents should be lightly damp, like a wrung-out sponge.
- Do a "squeeze test." Take a handful of compost and squeeze it. If it's too dry to stick together, add more water. If water trickles out, add more dry materials.
- Compost that has completely dried cannot be saved. Start over.

Aerating

Composting requires oxygen! This is a huge factor in how long composting takes.

- Turning your pile creates more air pockets.
- Adding **browns** helps boost oxygen levels by making space for air.
- If your composting unit empties from the bottom, turning the pile could mix your feedstock into your finished compost and increase your wait time. To avoid overmixing, aerate by inserting a broom handle from the top of the unit until it reaches the bottom. Wiggle it gently to create a shaft of air and repeat.

Chopping or Shredding

Smaller items will break down more quickly in your compost pile.

- Don't over chop, as smaller materials leave less space for oxygen.
- Bark protects woody plants even in the compost pile. Help microbes break down woody material faster by chopping sticks into pieces.



GREENS

- nitrogen-rich
- fresh and wet
- provide protein for decomposers

Examples:

- fruit and vegetable scraps
- coffee grounds
- crushed egg shells
- lawn or plant trimmings
- brewing waste
- manure from vegan animals



BROWNS

- carbon-rich
- dry and burnable
- provide calories for decomposers
- structure provides air space

Examples:

- dry leaves
- untreated woodchips/sawdust
- nut shells
- straw or pine needles
- cardboard or paper strips

TROUBLESHOOTING

Smells like ammonia or rotten eggs

- too many greens (add browns while turning)
- too much water (add browns while turning)
- not enough oxygen (turn pile)



Too hot

- pile too big (make smaller by splitting it into two)
- not enough ventilation (turn pile, add browns)



Too cold

- if winter, don't worry
- too little material (add material and insulate sides)
- lack of nitrogen (add greens while turning)
- lack of water (add water while turning)



Too dry

- add water while turning
- if completely dried out, throw out and start over



Attracting pests

- enclose the unit in quarter-inch hardware cloth
- mix thoroughly and cover exposed food scraps with a layer of browns or finished compost

