

# How To Compost



- Compost is decomposed organic matter that is part of a natural process of recycling organic material such as leaves and vegetable scraps into a rich soil amendment.
- Compost is crucial for soil and plant health, providing nutrients and microorganisms that support plant life and the soil food web.
- Use the following as a guide.

## Let's get started

1. Set up your compost bin in an outdoor area with semi- to full-sun exposure at least 10 feet away from any window or door (for potential odors).
2. Place a 1" layer of mulch (or other carbon-rich material) at the bottom of the compost bin.
3. Fill your compost bin *lasagna style*: add one layer of greens (up to 3" thick) and then cover with an equal amount of browns.
  - Lay the greens down first, to see how much carbon to add, and ensure equal amounts.
  - Create an insulation layer to keep odors down and maintain moisture.



### You'll need the following:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Compost bin                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Source of carbon-rich materials |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gloves                           | <input type="checkbox"/> Compost thermometer             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Shovel and/or pitchfork          | <input type="checkbox"/> Water                           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Source of nitrogen-rich material | <input type="checkbox"/> Sifter                          |

### Ingredients

Try to keep the following ingredients to 3" or smaller. The larger the material, the longer it will take to decompose.

- **Nitrogen-rich materials (greens)**
  - Uneaten food such as fruit and vegetable scraps (orange peels, carrot tops, apple cores, etc.)
  - Moldy fruits and vegetables
  - Coffee grounds
  - Loose tea leaves
  - Grass & garden clippings
  - Egg shells (calcium, not nitrogen)
- **Carbon-rich materials (browns)**
  - Mulch (dead leaves, twigs, branches)
  - Sawdust (from untreated wood)
  - Newspaper/brown paper shreadings

## Composting Timeline

- **Phase 1: Fill the compost bin**
    - Follow the instructions on page 1 to fill the compost bin.
    - The duration of this phase depends on how much material is added. Fill it up in 1 day or in 2 months, either works.
  - **Phase 2: Active decomposition**
    - Once full, to prevent too much heat harming the microbes, give the pile oxygen by removing the material, spreading it out, and placing it back in the bin.
    - Do this at least once a week.
    - This phase lasts about 4-6 weeks.
  - **Phase 3: Curing**
    - Allow the compost to return to ambient soil temperature (80°F) before sifting.
    - This phase lasts about 3-4 weeks.
  - **Phase 4: Sifting and application**
    - Sift the cured compost to remove chunky carbon.
    - Apply compost to your soil!
- Go back to phase 1!**

## Frequently Asked Questions

- **What materials should I avoid?**
  - Meats, cheeses, oil and fats.
  - *Compostable* products advertised as “bio-plastics.”
  - Flowers from flower farms known to contain high levels of pesticides.
  - Foods heavy in sugar, such as candy, cake, and processed foods.
- **Will the compost smell?**
  - Turn your compost pile regularly and keep a balanced mix of greens and browns to avoid a smelly bin.
- **How do you keep pests away?**
  - Keep a closed lid on your compost bin and fix any holes.
  - Keep the materials on the avoid list out of your compost to help eliminate potential odor and pests.
- **What if I don't have space?**
  - Purchase a worm composting bin.
  - Worm bins can be kept under your sink or in another cool location.

## Maintenance

- **Temperature Balance**
  - Use your thermometer to assess how well your compost is decomposing. A standard compost pile won't reach optimal temperatures (120°F or higher) until the bin is near/at capacity.
  - Too much browns can cause the pile to dry out and the bin won't reach high temperatures. Too much greens can cause the pile to become sludgy and excessively hot.
- **Moisture Balance**
  - The ideal moisture level is similar to a wrung-out sponge: not too wet, not too dry. If your compost is too dry, add water or more greens. If your compost is too wet, add more carbon.