COMPOSTING NATURE'S RECYCLING

REDUCE TRASH | SAVE MONEY | REDUCE CHEMICAL USE | GROW HEALTHY PLANTS | PROTECT GROUNDWATER

IT'S NOT HARD…

JUST LET NATURE DO THE WORK FOR YOU

Composting is a great way to recycle your kitchen waste and yard trimmings, reduce your trash output and generate a free and rich soil conditioner.

HOW DO I GET STARTED?

Decide if you want a compost pile (just a small area of the yard where you mix your ingredients) or a fabricated compost bin or tumbler. Generally, a bin is recommended to discourage pests and make it easier to access the finished compost.

There are many commercially produced compost bins, or you can build your own from numerous plans available online. Three feet by three feet is considered the ideal bin size.

OK, I HAVE A BIN, NOW WHAT?

Start by collecting kitchen scraps: carrot and potato peelings, wilted lettuce, apple cores, coffee grounds and filters, and other scraps. Keep a small container with a lid under your sink for easy use while you are cooking.

Start adding leaves, glass clippings, small twigs and so on to your outdoor bin. When your kitchen container is full, empty it into your compost bin. Mix the material, add some water, and cover it with a layer of brown, carbonrich matter (like dead leaves) to speed its decomposition and discourage pests.

Composting is not an exact science. If you combine roughly equal parts of nitrogen-rich and carbon-rich materials your compost should be off to a good start.

SOUND TOO MUCH LIKE CHEMISTRY CLASS?

Don't worry—all you have to know about nitrogen and carbon is that Nitrogen-rich materials are nice and green, such as freshly cut leaves and grass. Carbon-rich materials are crunchy, such as dried fall leaves and plant material, shredded paper (not glossy).

HOW DO I KNOW IT'S READY?

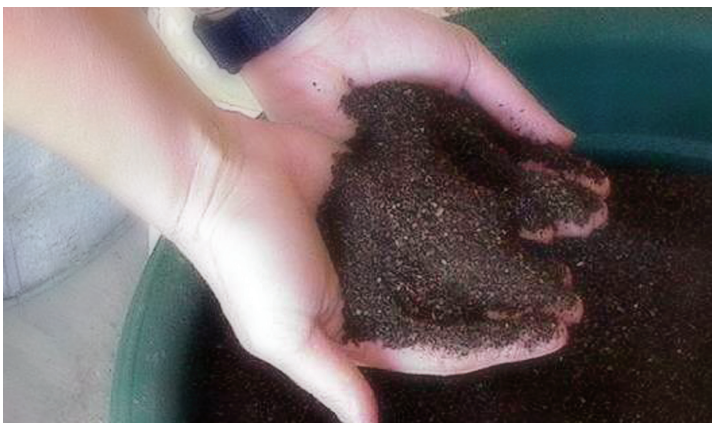
Finished compost is dark brown or black and crumbly with a rich, earthy smell. Using compost in the late summer or fall is ideal, so you can make room in your bin for fall leaves.

Recipe for great compost:

- Add roughly equal amounts of high-nitrogen items (such as freshly cut leaves and grass, kitchen scraps) and carbon-rich materials (such as dried fall leaves and plant material, shredded paper)
- Combine in a pile, pre-made compost bin or tumbler
- Add some water and mix
- Make sure your pile has enough air and water
- Mix occasionally, allow to decompose for 6-12 months

COMPOST IS GREAT TO USE:

- soil additive
- moisture-holding mulch around trees and on flower and vegetable beds
- lawn dressing
- mix with potting soil



THINGS YOU **CAN** ADD TO YOUR COMPOST	THINGS **NOT** TO ADD TO YOUR COMPOST
vegetable and fruit peelings	all meat products & bones
tea bags, tea leaves & coffee grounds	bread (attracts pests)
crushed egg shells	cooked food (attracts pests)
dead flowers and leaves	grease and oil
grass clippings	dog or cat waste
wood chips	big or chunky wood material
lawn grass from mowing	lime
shredded paper (not glossy)	weeds or invasive plants
straw and hay	ash from coal or charcoal
	anything not biodegradable

Remember, you want about half nitrogen-rich items and half carbon-rich items. Nitrogen-rich materials are typically soft and green (such as freshly cut leaves and grass). Carbon-rich materials are brown, (such as dried fall leaves and small branches).

GETTING THE HANG OF IT…

Here are some common composting problems and how to fix them.

SYMPTOM	PROBLEM	SOLUTION
Bad odor	Not enough air	**Turn/mix the compost**
Pile smells ok, but is not decomposing	Not enough water	**Moisten pile and turn material**
Liquid is leaking out bottom of the bin	Too much water. Materials should be should be damp, like a wrung-out sponge	**Add more of the dry carbon-rich materials and turn material**

HOW DOES COMPOSTING WORK?

First, you add materials to compost bin.

You add water and "turn" materials.

Microorganisms you can't see (such as bacteria and fungi) and Macroorganisms you can see (such as mites, earthworms and other insects) consume and break down the material.

With enough air and water, the microorganisms will produce heat. "Hot" compost decomposes faster than "cold" compost. If there is not enough water and oxygen, the microorganisms will die and composting will slow.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON COMPOSTING AND RECYCLING, VISIT THE FOLLOWING SITESL:

- austinrecycles.com/compost.htm
- epa.gov/epawaste/conserve/rrr/composting/index.htm
- tceq.state.tx.us/assistance/nav/composting.html
- compostguide.com