

# Urban Composting



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Cooperative Extension Program

Agriculture and Natural  
Resources

## The Benefits of Composting

- Increased plant nutrients in the soil
- Greater nutrient retention in soil
- Organic matter can lead to be better soil tilth
- Less compaction, which improves air and water filtration and helps root movement

## How to Compost ?

- Gather materials
- Identify a location
- Create a plan

## Ingredients for Composting

### **Composting includes three ingredients:**

- Brown (carbon) organic material, such as dead leaves
- Green (nitrogen) material, such as vegetable scraps
- Water



## What's Compostable?

- Green, nitrogen-containing matter:
  - Grass clippings
  - Fruit and vegetable scraps
  - Eggshells
  - Coffee grounds, coffee filters, and tea bags
- Animal manure
- Brown, carbon-containing matter:
  - Dry leaves
  - Yard trimmings
  - Hay and straw
  - Wood chips and sawdust
  - Paper napkins, towels, or any non-coated paper
  - Fireplace ashes
  - Dryer lint of natural fibers
  - Natural fabrics
- While the following are technically compostable, they can cause odor problems. So it's best to leave them out.
  - Meat, grease, and bones
  - Dairy products
  - Egg yolks
  - Weed seed heads



### Choose Your Composting Location

Choose a spacious spot on your land to collect these ingredients. Beginner composters may experience odor or unwanted pests. For that reason, place your bins away from the house. Don't include anything that'll attract animals, such as meat scraps, bones, fats, or dairy.

### Compost Bin Size

- A portable composting bin is best made of woven wire (e.g., hardware cloth with ½" openings).
- Need from 11 ft. to 23 ft. of hardware cloth 3 ft. wide.
- Tie the ends together with hooks or wire.
- You can also build a framed composting bin with treated lumber and hardware cloth.

### Maintenance

The pile must reach about 140 degrees Fahrenheit for three to five days to kill pathogens and weed seeds. Done correctly, this takes about a week. Once the pile's heated, use a pitchfork to turn everything, bringing the inside out and the bottom to the top. Allow the pile to heat again, turn, and repeat every few weeks.

- You can purchase a long thermometer to measure the internal temperature.
- When turning, assess your pile's needs. Bad smells or an ammonia odor means it's too tightly packed, has too much green material, or is too wet. If needed, add more brown material and shape to allow the water to run off.

### Application

- Your compost is ready when it no longer heats up after turning. The process takes one to five months. Finished compost is dark and crumbly with a pleasant smell.
- There is no right or wrong time to apply compost to your soil. You may decide to spread 1 inch of compost over your garden bed in the fall and cover with a winter mulch.
- Apply the compost a few weeks before planting in the spring. You can also use it as a side-dressing after setting your plants throughout the growing season.



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