Backyard Composting: A Beginner’s Guide

COMPOSTING is a process that converts food scraps and yard waste — such as leaves and grass clippings — into a useful, nutrient-rich soil amendment. A compost bin is the perfect complement to your backyard garden!

GETTING STARTED
Once you have your tools and ingredients, composting is simply a matter of adding materials to your bin in the right quantities. Think of it as a green and brown lasagna! Follow the steps below to start.

What do I need?
• A standard plastic compost bin or a homemade bin made from timber, chicken wire, etc.
• Garden fork, compost turner or some kind of poking tool
• Green organic ingredients
• Brown organic ingredients

Ratio of Greens to Browns
To start, use equal portions of half green and half brown materials.
Then, as you gain confidence, alter your ratio based on the conditions of the pile.

1. Position your bin somewhere where you will have easy access from your kitchen. Place in half sun, half shade for the best results. The warmer the location, the faster the compost will work. Make sure to line the bottom with hardware cloth to minimize pests.

2. Create your first layer with dry shredded leaves and twigs: Place the brown ingredients at the bottom and water thoroughly. The water encourages bacterial growth, which will allow your material to start breaking down.

3. Your second layer includes green ingredients: Add a layer of clippings, plant scraps or other green material so that it is roughly the same thickness as your first brown layer.

4. Additionally, you can add a thin layer of soil from your garden. Soil contains useful microorganisms to kick start your compost.

5. As you go, continue to add brown and green ingredients in equal volumes; see chart for what ingredients are considered brown and green. Mix the pile.

6. Your compost is ready when it looks like rich, dark soil. You can slide up the lower door or tilt the bin and scrape away the finished compost at the bottom, or lift off the bin and start a new pile.
Tips and Tricks

Break up ingredients
By breaking up your ingredients into smaller pieces, you'll allow your compost to decompose faster and speed up the pace of composting.

Keep the air flowing
Keeping it aerated helps to speed up the composting process. To achieve this, turn your pile over or poke holes in it every few weeks with garden fork, metal post or a compost turner. Dry shredded leaves or shredded newspaper also help to create space in your compost that holds air.

Store materials
Prepare a bucket of your brown material ahead of time. This way you will have the material handy when you go to add your new batch of green material from the kitchen or garden.

NEVER COMPOST
Stay away from these materials as they will cause your compost pile to smell, attract animals and/or contaminate your finished compost with chemicals and weeds.

- Plastics
- Metals
- Chemicals (including clippings from treated grass)
- Weeds with seeds
- Diseased plants
- Meat
- Dairy
- Oily foods
- Human / dog / cat waste
- Glossy paper
- Treated lumber or sawdust

Trouble-shooting
Having problems with your compost? Check out the chart below to see what you can do!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symptoms</th>
<th>Possible Cause</th>
<th>Solutions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unpleasant odor from pile</td>
<td>Not enough oxygen/compaction</td>
<td>Aerate by stirring pile or put in big sticks to help with airflow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not enough oxygen/too wet</td>
<td>Mix in dry materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ammonia smell</td>
<td>Too much nitrogen</td>
<td>Mix in dry brown materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of nitrogen</td>
<td>Mix in some greens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not enough moisture</td>
<td>Water pile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pile needs to be turned</td>
<td>Use a pitchfork, turn outside to center</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Compost may be finished</td>
<td>Remove finished compost and start over</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pests are found in the bin</td>
<td>Gnats (these will not harm anything but can be annoying)</td>
<td>Try adding a layer of brown to the top</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mammals</td>
<td>Line the bottom of the pile with hardware cloth or use plastic bin with locking lid</td>
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