

This pamphlet outlines composting basics to help you start your own backyard composting.



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This information was gathered from the Basics of Composting from [mastercomposter.com](http://mastercomposter.com)



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# Composting



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Find more Yard Smart recommendations at [yardsmart.org](http://yardsmart.org)

## How to Compost

### **Find a Location for the Pile**

Locate your pile at least 2 feet from any structure, and avoid building against structures like a house or fence. Macroorganisms (insects, etc.) assist you in the composting process; you want them in the pile, not in the house.

### **Set up a Compost Bin (optional)**

A bin is not necessary. You can just build a pile on the ground.

However, bins help keep compost piles looking neat, retain heat and moisture, and avoid the negative effects of wind and weather. Bins also help deter pests, particularly in rural areas where they are more prevalent.

### **Prepare the Materials (optional)**

Ensure you have both GREENS—nitrogen (grass, manure, vegetable and fruit scraps) and BROWNS—carbons (leaves, wood chips). Shred carbons that are more than 1–2" in size.

### **Build the Pile**

Throw in organic materials as they become available. This results in a very slow decomposition process, but is fine if you do not need finished compost soon.

### **Cover the Pile (optional)**

Experts disagree on whether a cover is necessary. If you live in a region that is excessively dry or excessively wet, cover the pile with a black plastic garbage bag to retain moisture or guard against rain.

### **Turn the Pile (optional)**

Turn or stir the pile. Turning the pile decreases composting time, allows all the material to be exposed to the hot center, and increases aeration.

### **Monitor the Pile (optional)**

Check to see that your pile becomes hot within a few days. The pile's heat should peak again after turning. Monitor moisture content—when you pick up a handful of material it should feel like a wrung-out sponge.

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If you are building a pile using the batch process for faster decomposition, follow these steps:

- Wet the ground under the pile.
- Put twigs or other larger carbon materials on the bottom of the pile to provide some aeration at the base.
- Layer the rest of your materials, alternating nitrogen and carbon layers. Add water as you go.
- End with a carbon layer.

## When Is Compost Finished?

Finished compost will only take up 25–40% of its original space. When individual materials are no longer identifiable and the pile resembles dark rich soil, the compost is complete. It will smell sweet, woody, and earthy, and will crumble through your fingers.

From beginning to end, the composting process can take 6 weeks to 2 years depending on methods. Everything matters—how often the pile is turned, what materials went into the pile, the condition of the materials, moisture, adequate air, pile size, heat levels, etc. If you add materials as you get them, and don't turn or stir your pile, the material at the bottom will become compost first. You can remove compost from the bottom of the pile, use it, and then return the rest of the materials to the bin or pile to continue decomposing.