

A Composting Primer : Six Easy Steps to Making Great Compost!

Enormous benefits can be had by adding just a little compost to your soil. Adding compost improves soil structure, aeration and water retention. It also adds important micronutrients and increases the bacterial activity in the soil.

Homeowners and gardeners refer to compost as "Black Gold" or "Gardeners" Gold, because there's simply nothing better you can do for your soil than to add compost!



Step 1 : Selecting a composting bin

There are many types of bins used to hold the composting materials. There are commercially made square or cone shaped plastic bins, homemade square bins often made of wood, and rotating tumbler style bins just to name a few. Each type of bin has its' own advantages and disadvantages, but all types of bins can be used for composting.

Step 2 : Find a location for your composting bin

Choose a site that is level and well drained that is easily accessible year-round. Place the bin over bare soil rather than concrete or paving to ensure that worms and other beneficial organisms can make their way into the pile. It's a good idea to remove any grass or plants and turn the soil to a depth of about 6 - 8 inches.

Step 3 : Include good composting materials

Generally, composting ingredients can be divided into two categories: Brown materials such as leaves, hay, straw and paper, and green materials such as grass clippings, fresh manure, vegetable trimmings and most green plant cuttings.



Step 4 : Do not add these materials to your compost

There are a number of materials that you should keep out of your compost pile. Adding some items, like vegetable fats and dairy products will simply slow down the composting process by excluding the oxygen that helpful organisms need to do their job. If you add these materials you will still have usable compost, it will just take much longer.

Adding other materials to your pile is simply dangerous because of the chance of poisoning or disease. Human and pet feces, chemically or pressure treated wood or sawdust, and meat and animal fats fall into this category and should never be added to your compost pile.

Step 5 : Making Great Compost

Start with a 4-inch layer of brush, twigs, hay or straw at the bottom of the bin. Then add a 4-inch layer of brown material, then a thin layer of finished compost or good garden soil. That's one layer. Then add a 4-inch layer of green material topped with a thin layer of compost or soil. Moisten each layer by misting it lightly with a garden hose. Keep adding materials in alternating layers of greens and browns until the bin is full.

Once you have a full bin you can turn the pile every 14 days or so. The more you turn the pile, the faster you will have finished compost!

Step 6 : Using Your Compost

It can take anywhere from 14 days to several months to produce your finished compost. The time it takes can vary widely depending on the materials and methods used. The point at which the compost is ready varies based on how the compost will be used. In general, though, compost is ready when dark and crumbly and mostly broken down with a pleasant, earthy, soil-like smell to it. For most uses it is acceptable to have some recognizable pieces of leaves or straw remaining.

Compost can be used for:

- House Plants
- Soil amendment and fertilizer
- Flower and Vegetable Beds
- New planting areas
- Established planting areas
- Lawn top dressing
- Compost Tea
- Around trees

