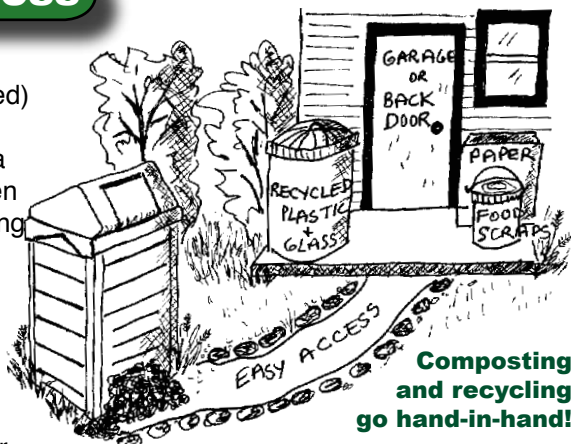


Siting Your Compost Area

Ease of Access

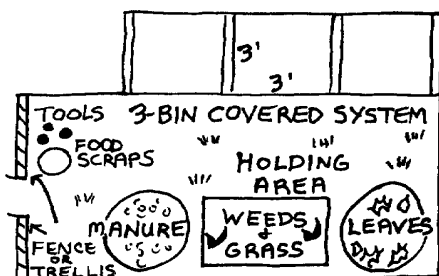
- Place your compost bin (and holding bin, if desired) near your back door, or further in the yard by a fence or vegetable garden
- It is okay for your recycling and composting areas to be near each other
- Store a lidded food scrap bucket nearby that you can later add to your bin
- Create a pathway to your bin or compost area, if desired
- Ensure that a water spigot or hose is near bin
- Keep compost turner tool handy!



Composting and recycling go hand-in-hand!

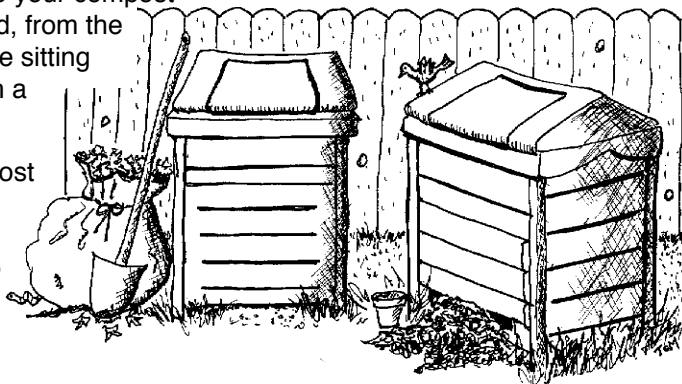
Make Room!

- Create space for more than one compost bin just in case you expand your system
- Plan room for one or more holding bins to stockpile raw materials (very important!)



For the ambitious composter with a large yard — a multi-bin system with a holding area for stockpiling is ideal

- Visually separate your compost system, if desired, from the garden or favorite sitting areas; even from a nosey neighbor
- Keep your compost area neat & tidy. Plant flowers & shrubs nearby to beautify it



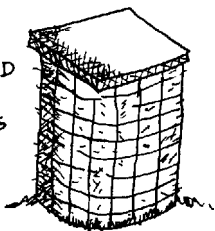
Professor Rot
says:



“Plan Carefully . . .”

- **Adequate air circulation** around bin
- **Out of full sun** (to prevent excessive heat build-up in plastic bins)
- **Placement on bare ground** for ease of drainage (place on cement with sealed bottom if required by law in your area)
- **Away from large trees** (their roots steal nutrients from compost)
- **Away from wooden structures** susceptible to rot if in contact with decomposing debris

AERATED
GRASS
HOLDING
BIN



TIGHT
LID
NEWS
PAPER

Stockpiling Materials

Successful home composters know how to plan ahead. This means storing “greens” and “browns” to be used in the bin later. Without a holding area it would be difficult to have enough volume at any one time to make a pile large enough (called a “batch”) to heat-up properly. Use these guidelines:

What & Where



- **Fallen leaves** — covered pile or bagged
- **Weeds & manure** — holding bin
- **Grass clippings** — holding bin (not in plastic bags)
- **Other yard waste** — holding bin
- **Food scraps** — plastic pail with lid

How to Stockpile

Place your holding bin near your compost bin. It need not be fancy or rodent proof. A circular bin made from chicken wire or field fencing is popular. Scrap lumber, doors or wooden pallets can be nailed together. Make sure the bin has easy access and can be covered. (Several bins are good!)

Empty **food scraps** from a small kitchen container into a larger tightly-lidded pail (4-5 gallon [3-5 Imperial] sized is good for storage). A few layers of newspaper inside of lid will discourage flies. Don't worry about liquid inside the pail; it is caused from scraps beginning to decompose. This “compost tea” can be poured into your bin. When adding fresh scraps to pail, dust top with sawdust, peat moss or rock dust to control odors or flies.



PROFESSOR ROT'S GUIDE to What to Compost

Do Compost

Grass clippings

Leaves

Weeds

Dead plants

Food scraps

Fruit wastes

Manure

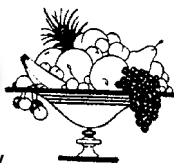
Straw/Hay

Coffee grounds

Hair, lint

Composting challenges us to take a little more responsibility as a planetary citizen. Many people are used to just throwing waste into a trash can, closing the lid and walking away from it — out of sight, out of mind! Here's some advice about some of those compostable yard and kitchen wastes.

Food Scraps



Food scraps are generated in abundance in nearly every household. Orange and grapefruit rinds, apple cores, broccoli stalks, old lettuce and cabbage leaves, onion skins, leftovers, stale bread, coffee grounds, tea bags and the like: all of these will delight the microbes in your compost bin more than you can ever imagine (like a delicious milkshake on a hot summer day). Never mind if these succulent tidbits are moldy or a little soggy.

RED ALERT!

Do not put **GREASE, BONES, DAIRY PRODUCTS & MEAT** in your pile. Why? They smell bad, attract animals, especially rodents and raccoons, and breakdown slowly. And, if you have a worm bin, please don't put them in there either. Otherwise, have a nice day!

Manure & Solid Wastes



The best manure, as a valuable nitrogen source, is from grass eaters (cud chewers) such as cow, steer, sheep, goat, llama, etc., and from chickens and rabbits. **It acts as an activator to heat up the pile.** Horse manure tends to have more weed seeds. **Don't compost human, cat or dog wastes** (they may carry disease pathogens). Get manure at a farm or pasteurized in plastic bags at a garden center.

Leaves



Leaves are one of the most important ingredients for successful composting. They are considered a “brown” source of carbon when dry and a “green” source of nitrogen when fresh. They break down much faster if shredded, to create rich, dark leaf mulch when fully decomposed.

Maple, oak, birch, alder, aspen, elm, and leaves from fruit trees, among others, are great. See page 25, “How to Compost Leaves & Weeds,” for further information on using leaves and what leaves to avoid.



Weeds & Yard Waste

Use these commonsense guidelines:

- Don't put in your bin any yard debris that is diseased, full of weed seeds, possibly toxic, or otherwise questionable
- If it's been sprayed with pesticides, herbicides or fungicides, seriously think twice before composting
- Pernicious weeds & grasses that can resprout should be avoided unless they are completely dead, dry, or the bin can heat up to 130-140°F (54-60°C)
- See “How to Compost Leaves & Weeds” (page 25) and “How to Compost Garden Debris” (page 26)

Don't Compost

Weeds:
“Gone-to-seed”
Invasive

Wood ashes
Lime
BBQ charcoal

Meat
Grease
Bones
Dairy Products

Solid Wastes:
Cat or Dog
Human

Plastic
Metal
Glass

Contaminated
Matter

Large amounts
of soggy
materials

Branches &
wood chunks

RED ALERT! About Ashes

Some people use wood ashes or add lime to their compost bin. We don't recommend this because they are too alkaline and would raise your pile's ideal pH level of 6.8-7.0. Many plants (blueberries, strawberries, azaleas, natives, etc.) wouldn't like the results either. Never compost BBQ ashes or coal —the sulfur dioxides and other chemicals will give the little worms and plants in your garden bad stomach aches.

Composting:

A Quick Start Guide

For Slower Compost (3-8 months)

Note: For detailed explanation of this method, see the **Add-as-you-go Pile**, pages 20-21

Step 1

Place 2 parts moist **GREEN** and 1 part dry **BROWN** materials in a rodent-proof bin with lid. Cover food scraps well. **OR**

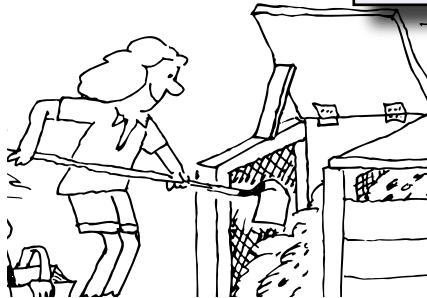
Just add waste materials to bin as you go.



Dry leaves are great **BROWNS!**
Food scraps and fresh garden debris are great **GREENS!**

Step 2

Maintain a moisture level of a damp, wrung-out sponge and allow for good air flow into bin.



Professor Rot says: "This fellow would increase the heat in his homemade bin if he put a sheet of plywood or other covering on top. Or maybe he's simply turning his compost pile - *good idea!*"

FINISHED COMPOST!

A finished compost pile will be at least half of its original volume. The most usable compost is on the bottom of the pile. That's why manufactured bins have trapdoors at the bottom - *good idea!*

Step 3

Continue to add materials to your bin and maintain moisture level.

For Faster Compost (1-3 months)

Note: For detailed explanation of this method, see **How to Make a Batch Pile**, page 22



Step 2

Alternating moist **GREEN** with dry **BROWN** materials, add each in 2-3in/5-7.6cm layers until bin is full. Mix if desired.

Step 3

Add nitrogen-rich activator, if desired, intermixed with layers

Step 4

Using a spray nozzle, moisten as you go, so each layer is the consistency of a damp, wrung-out sponge. Allow for good air circulation into bin

Step 5

Seal pile with a layer of finished compost or soil and cover bin

Step 6

Turn pile every 7-10 days, if desired, moistening if needed

Note:

An alternative method to layering (Step 2) is to throw all your accumulated materials into your bin or pile. Continue with other steps, adjusting them to accommodate this method.

Step 1

Place coarsest materials on bottom of rodent-proof bin or pile (use small twigs, stalks, etc)

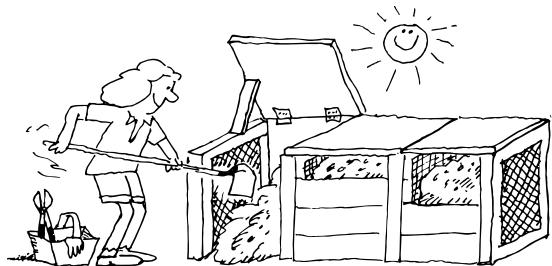


The high temperature of a Batch Pile helps make fast compost!
Now, that's cool!

Never Forget the 4 Rules of Composting



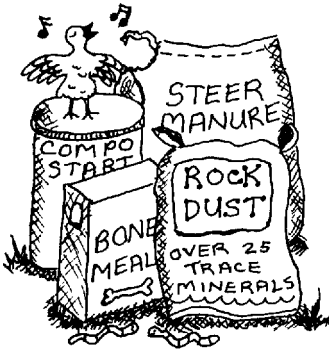
1. Quality **Materials**
(Activators may be useful, too)
2. Adequate **Volume** of pile
3. Consistent **Moisture**
4. Good **Air** circulation



How to Use

Compost Activators

Why Use an Activator?



A well-made pile will heat up naturally on its own. But not all compost piles are created equal. Perhaps you have too much high-carbon material (“Browns” such as dried leaves, straw, sawdust, etc.), or maybe the weather is too cool. Perhaps, as a beginner, you’re too insecure about all this composting know-how. Take heart, you can enhance the ability of the pile to “heat-up” (thus decompose sooner) by adding what is called an activator.



What is an Activator?



Technically, an activator is high in nitrogen and usually comes in powdered form (bloodmeal, bonemeal, alfalfa meal and other “meals”). Some are enzyme-acting so that when mixed in water and sprinkled in your pile they are activated like a yeast. Still others are as simple as manure (chicken, cow, goat, rabbit, etc.), whether fresh or dry. Commercial brand mixes (in 5lb/2.26kg boxes) are available at garden centers and usually have several ingredients from the chart listed below plus other high nitrogen sources. Follow the directions on the box.

Common Activators

(by % of Nitrogen)

| | |
|------|-----------------------|
| 2.4% | Alfalfa meal |
| 15% | Bloodmeal |
| 4% | Bonemeal |
| 8% | Chicken manure (dry) |
| 2.1% | Coffee grounds |
| 7% | Cottonseed meal |
| 6% | Soybean meal |
| 2.4% | Rabbit manure (fresh) |
| 12% | Rabbit manure (dry) |

Most of the above activators work equally well. Remember:

A little goes a long way!

How to Apply

- Manure (fresh) — layer 2-3” (5-7.5cm) deep on top of green/brown layers of materials in bin
- Manure (dry) — dust on in small amounts, 3-4 times in a “Batch” pile, or a dusting on top of scraps in an “Add-as-you-go” pile
- Powdered meals & coffee grounds — dust on, as stated above
- Enzyme-acting — mix with about 1qt/1liter of water, sprinkle into pile as you layer or add to it (follow directions on package)

How to Make a Batch Compost Pile

Fast Results (1-3 mos) BUT Takes Planning!

Ask Yourself:

- Do I have an empty bin ready to fill?
- Have I stockpiled enough **brown** & **green** materials to fill a bin?
- Do I have a sweet treat ready to reward myself when done?

Step 1



Coarse materials on bottom

Place about a 3-inch (7cm) layer of the coarsest materials (stalks, straw/hay, small twigs, tall weeds) on or near the bottom of bin. Chop them well to increase surface area for faster breakdown

Step 3



Optional Use of Activator:

As pile is building up, intermix layers of a nitrogen-rich activator (especially on top of food scraps or smelly items) — a little goes a long way!

Step 2

Build pile up as follows:

- Add 2-3 inch (5-7cm) layer of moist **green** materials
- Add 2-3 inch (5-7cm) layer of drier **brown** materials and moisten using spray nozzle of hose
- Repeat this layering & moistening until bin is full
- Pile should have the consistency of a wrung-out sponge



Step 4

Cover pile/bin

To retain moisture & heat, and to keep animals out. Insure good air flow around and into bin



Step 5

Optional Turning:

Turn pile (garden fork, shovel, or compost turner tool) every 7-10 days. This brings outer layers into the center where temperatures are hottest. Turning creates passages for air and moisture, thereby causing re-heating and faster decomposition

Step 6

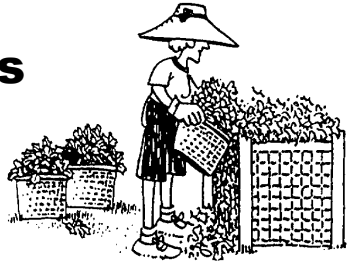
Check moisture level

Do this weekly. Add water to maintain consistency of a wrung-out sponge



So, when does this compost heap get done?! Hopefully in about 4-12 weeks (the bin should have about 1/2 the original volume). Every batch varies, like homemade bread. See Troubleshooting Chart, p. 29

How to Compost Leaves & Weeds



Every backyard environmentalist knows the incredible value of leaves for composting and general mulching purposes. Leaves are nature's most abundant recycling resource and are perfectly complemented when composted with weeds. Here are some great tips:

Leaf Strategies

Remember:

Fresh/green = nitrogen
dry/brown = carbon

Bag, store, or pile leaves near bin for use year-round in composting

Large quantities can be mowed or shredded, speeding decomposition and using 1/4 the space!

Use as a Fall mulch around plants and to amend soil

Use as general mulch for weed control and to keep soil moisture

Need leaves? Arrange for their free delivery by your municipal waste management department or a private yardcare business

USE CAUTION WITH THESE LEAVES!

Poisonous types

Leaves from plants such as oleander, hemlock and castor bean can harm soil life — add sparingly

Acid & Resin types

Walnut, eucalyptus, bay, laurel, cypress, juniper, acacia are toxic to other plants & soil life — add sparingly or not at all

pH inbalancers

Ash & poplar/cottonwood raise pH, making alkaline soil (abundant in semiarid and arid climates) more alkaline. Rhubarb's oxalic acid lowers pH. Add sparingly.

Fibrous

Magnolia, laurel, rhododendron take a long time to break down — chop thoroughly first

Diseased & Insect Infested

Plant leaves with rust, fungus, mildew, or seriously infested with insect pests — keep out of bin (option: take to landfill)

Weed Tips



Weeds are plants too! It's just that they may be too vigorous for a garden or yard. However, you can compost them!

Tip #1: Compost 2 parts fresh weeds (**green**) with 1 part dry leaves (**brown**)

Tip #2: "No Weed Gone to Seed" should be put in your bin unless you can heat the pile to above 140°F (60°C) to kill (roast) the seeds

Tip #3: Don't compost pernicious weeds/grasses such as morningglory, buttercups, bermuda grass, oxalis, quackgrass, crabgrass, etc.

Fact: Over 30% of a household's trash is compostable yard & kitchen waste. Most yard debris hauled away is leaves and grass clippings

TROUBLESHOOTING CHART

PROBLEM: Compost pile does not heat up

| Symptom / Cause | Solution |
|---|--|
| Too wet: compost materials are soggy; there is not enough air | Turn the pile , adding dry absorbent material (carbon/"brown") |
| Too dry: not enough moisture | Moisten pile without saturating it |
| Pile is moist but isn't decomposing; or it is only damp and warm in the center: too much carbon (brown) material, not enough nitrogen (green) matter | Turn pile , adding nitrogen-rich materials such as manure, grass clippings, fresh leaves, vegetable or fruit wastes Consider adding an activator |

PROBLEM: Odor

Ammonia smell: too much nitrogen (green matter) in pile (possibly too many grass clippings) or pile is too alkaline (possibly too much limestone added to pile)

If nitrogen problem: **turn pile** and add more carbon(brown) material

If alkaline related: **turn pile** and add acid material like sawdust, oak leaves, vegetable scraps

Putrid smell (like rotten eggs): pile is too wet/not enough oxygen (is putrefying, not decomposing!)

Turn pile to aerate it and add dry carbon (brown) materials to absorb excessive moisture

PROBLEM: Pests (rats, raccoons, fruit flies, ants, etc.)

Rodents & raccoons are attracted to meat & fatty food scraps like cheese and other dairy products

Remove meat/fatty foods from bin
Turn pile to increase temperature
Balance carbon to nitrogen ratio
Use rodent-proof bin; keep lid on, put 1/4-inch wire mesh on bottom or sides and insure air venting holes are less than 1/2-in diameter

Flies and gnats, etc. are attracted to uncovered wastes, especially fruits, melons, and vegetables

Don't leave exposed! Mix or cover with carbon (brown) materials, finished compost or some soil

Professor Rot also says:

"Be careful putting weeds with seeds in your pile. The pile needs to get very hot to kill them (140°F/60°C). If your finished compost is full of stringy or woody material, try chopping or shredding materials before adding to pile."