

Composting Questions & Answers



Q: How long does it take to produce compost?

The Thermoquick design and strategically placed vents promote aerobic composting. Chopping or shredding the materials before and turning after input also help speed the process which can take several months. Maintaining moisture helps as well.

Q: Why should I compost?

Backyard composting recycles your yard clippings, fruits, and vegetable leftovers into a valuable soil amendment while saving money and reducing land-fill waste. You will be doing your part to protect and improve the quality of your environment.



ORGANIC MATERIALS

These are your yard clippings and the kitchen waste that a decomposer feeds on, turning them into compost. The materials that are suitable for composting are either carbon materials (brown and dry) or nitrogen materials (green and moist).

Carbon materials include fallen leaves, sawdust, straw, and dry grass clippings.



Nitrogen materials include freshly cut green grass and fruit and vegetable scraps.



JUST ADD WATER AND STIR

Composting is a natural process. You can simply put yard clippings in a pile and let Nature take its course. Composting will now happen; yet it will happen slowly. You can help it along by providing a balanced diet and an enriched environment for the organisms that do the work of composting.

You can speed it up by adding earthworms and/or an organic "compost starter." A "compost nutrient" may be added to break down hard to decompose leaves such as Oak.

Composters are open at the bottom to allow drainage and keep the soil moist to attract worms and microorganisms, since worms are the #1 facilitators of composting.

If the composter attracts rodents, just wait for the neighborhood cats to discover the pests' food source and your problem will be over.



The Essentials of Composting

MOISTURE

Decomposer organisms also need water to compost efficiently. The compost pile should be watered periodically, depending upon temperatures and rainfall. A moisture content of 40% is desired. This is the moisture content of a damp sponge.

AIR

Like most living creatures, the decomposer organisms need oxygen to survive. A properly aerated (aerobic) pile will compost faster and more thoroughly than an oxygen-starved (anaerobic) pile. The pile is aerated when you turn and mix the material. The pile should be turned every one to two weeks to maintain proper aeration.

SURFACE AREA

It is best to have your materials properly shredded before putting them into a compost pile. Doing so will increase the surface area that the decomposer organisms have to feed upon, which makes the organisms more efficient and able to create compost faster. Always mow or chop up material before it is added to the compost pile. Proper particle size reduction can be explained by an analogy using a block of ice. A block of ice will melt very slowly. Crush that same amount of ice, and it will melt much more quickly. The same principle works for a compost pile. A large piece of organic material will decompose slowly, taking longer to compost. That same item, when chopped up, will decompose much more quickly.

DO COMPOST

NITROGEN

- Barnyard manure
- Coffee grounds
- Flowers
- Fruit and vegetable trimmings
- Grass clippings
- Green leaves
- Sod
- Weeds

CARBON

- Ash – small amounts
- Bread
- Coffee filters
- Dry leaves
- Eggshells
- Hair
- Lint
- Paper with no ink, small amounts
- Sawdust
- Straw
- Tea leaves with bags
- Wood shavings

DO NOT COMPOST

- Bones
- Butter
- Cat litter
- Cheese
- Chicken
- Diapers
- Diseased plants
- Dog or cat feces
- Fish
- Greasy foods
- Invasive weeds
- Lard
- Meat
- Milk products
- Oils
- Peanut butter
- Salad dressing
- Sour cream
- Unchopped woody waste
- Vegetable oil

SYMPTOM

PROBLEM

SOLUTION

The pile smells bad.

- Too much moisture.
- Too much nitrogen-rich material in the pile.

- Turn the pile.
- Do not water as often and turn the pile to dry out the material.
- Add leaves or other carbon-rich material to the pile.

The pile will not get hot.

- Not enough water.
- Pile too small.
- Not enough nitrogen-rich materials in the pile.
- Particle size too large.

- Add water.
- Gather more material and build the pile.
- Mix in fresh nitrogen-rich materials, such as grass or fruit and vegetable trimmings.
- Chop or grind material to reduce the particle size.

The pile is attracting flies, rodents, or other pests.

- Protein-rich, fatty, or sugary foods are present in the pile.
- Food is exposed.

- Be sure to leave meat, bones, oily foods, and dairy products out of the compost pile.
- Bury the fruit and vegetable trimmings at least 6–12 inches deep.