

What is Compost?

Compost is a crumbly, dark, nutrient-rich material made up of decomposed organic material such as leaves, grass clippings, wood chips and kitchen scraps from vegetables and fruits.

What we may consider as waste from the yard or kitchen is actually a great source of nutrients for smaller organisms like insects, bacteria and fungi. These organisms will decompose "wastes," turning it into useful compost.



Passive Composting: Also called *cold composting* requires the least amount of attention or work. Compost is produced slowly, over a period of about a year.

Active Composting: Often called *hot composting*, this method requires more maintenance but will produce compost quickly, in a matter of weeks, depending on the conditions.

Why Should I Compost?

Compost provides many valuable benefits.

- Reduces waste, extending the lifespan of landfills.
- Improves soil structure, allowing for better root growth.
- Adds nutrients to the soil and improves plant health.
- Saves money by reducing the need for chemical fertilizers.

What Goes into Compost?

Compost consists of carbon-rich "brown" material and nitrogen-rich "green" material. For effective composting, a balance of 2-3 parts brown to 1 part green should be a goal.

BROWNS include materials like dry leaves, twigs, straw, woodchips, newspaper and paper towels.

GREENS include materials like grass clippings, vegetable and fruit scraps, coffee grounds and tea bags.

AVOID Composting:

- Fats, oils and grease
- Unwashed egg shells
- Meat and fish
- Pet waste
- Dairy products
- Invasive plants
- Diseased plants



Consider the things that might go into the trash — why not compost it instead? Make it: Two-thirds of your compost "brown" and one-third of your compost "green."

How to Compost?

1. Consider your composting needs and goals to determine if you want to use active or passive composting strategies.
2. Choose a convenient, well-drained area for your compost pile. Avoid composting in direct sunlight or near wooden structures. Also consider HOA restrictions and your neighbors.
3. Determine how much you want to compost. Space may be a limiting factor, but the ideal size for a compost pile is 3' x 3' x 3'.
4. Choose a composting structure. Various types of attractive compost bins are available for purchase. However, you can also choose to build your own bin.

Factors You Can Control

Here is a list of the four major factors that can be controlled in compost as well as the ideal conditions for each factor:

FACTOR	IDEAL CONDITION
Oxygen (Air)	Turn the pile once a week for active composting; twice a year for passive composting
Temperature	130°F to 160°F for active composting, less than 113°F for passive composting
Water Content	"Consistency" of a squeezed out sponge
Food	Maintain 2-3 parts brown to 1 part green for active composting, focus less on this in passive composting

The recipe for successful composting.

PROBLEM	POSSIBLE CAUSE	SOLUTION
Rotten smell	Pile too wet or compacted	Add carbon (Browns) and turn the pile
Ammonia smell	Too much nitrogen (Greens)	Add carbon (Browns) and turn the pile
Too wet	Too much water	Add carbon (Browns) and turn the pile
Too dry	Too little water	Turn the pile, add water, cover pile to protect from sun
Cool to the touch	Not enough nitrogen (Greens)	Add nitrogen (Greens) and turn the pile
Too hot	Too much nitrogen (Greens)	Add carbon (Browns) and turn the pile
Pests	Kitchen scraps not buried, uncovered pile	Bury food scraps deep in the pile, or use a bin with a lid

Additional Resources

Maryland Home and Garden Information Center

- www.hgic.umd.edu
- Backyard Composting: www.hgic.umd.edu, go to Publications on the left, choose Online Publications, then choose Soil, Mulch and Composting. Select HG35, Backyard Composting.

Montgomery County Department of Environmental Protection

The county may offer free compost bins to county residents. For more information:

- www.montgomerycountymd.gov/swstmpl.asp?url=/content/dep/solidwaste/store/compost_bins.asp

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

The EPA provides information on resource conservation and composting

- www.epa.gov/wastes/conserves/rrr/composting



Environmental Management Division
 Dept. of Public Works
www.rockvillemd.gov/environment
 30 Courthouse Sq., # 100, Rockville, MD 20850
 240-314-8870
 email: environment@rockvillemd.gov

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City of Rockville

Backyard Composting

*Turn Spoils Into Soil
 by Recycling Yard and
 Kitchen Waste*



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