

Composting 101



Illinois Extension

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

WHAT IS COMPOST?

Compost is organic material made from food scraps and yard waste such as grass clippings. Compost is used to enrich soil as an alternative to traditional soil amendments such as fertilizer. It is safe to use on edible plants and can be made from material you already have.

WHY IS COMPOSTING IMPORTANT?

Typically, food and organic materials that are thrown away get mixed up with other materials at landfills and do not break down effectively. Composting organics takes this material out of the waste stream and transforms it into a valuable resource.

Organic materials decomposing in landfills release methane gas, **which is 30x more powerful than carbon dioxide** in contributing to climate change.

HOW DO I COMPOST?

There are many ways to compost depending on your living situation.

- **Composting Outdoors:** Build a compost bin or pile in a backyard or outdoor area.
- **Collection Services:** Food and yard scrap collection or drop-off services may be available. Inquire with local municipalities.
- **Vermiculture:** A small worm bin can be used indoors to turn kitchen scraps into compost.



WHAT TO COMPOST?

A healthy compost pile needs a balance of brown materials, which add Carbon (C), and green materials, which add Nitrogen (N).

The ideal brown to green ratio is 3:1.

The pile also needs air, moisture, and turning.

- **Browns - Carbon:** Nutshells, crushed eggshells, leaves, corn stalks/cobs, straw, hay, sawdust, wood chips, twigs, wood ash, paper, cotton string/thread, wool
- **Greens - Nitrogen:** Vegetables, fruit, food scraps, bread, coffee grounds, tea bags/leaves, fresh grass clippings, plants, flowers, chicken/livestock manure
- **Prohibited:** Meat, fish, bones, dairy products, oil, weed seeds, diseased plants, glossy paper, pet manure, any harsh chemicals

PROBLEM SOLVING

- **Smelly?** Too much nitrogen.
- **Won't break down?** Too much carbon.
- **Pests?** Don't use prohibited items.

Learn More
extension.illinois.edu

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