

YARD WASTE COMPOST RECIPES

There are many ways to make good compost. Here are two basic recipes to help you get started. Choose the recipe that suits the amount of time and effort you want to spend.

Quick and Hot Compost

Made in batches that are ready to use in 2 to 3 months.

Ingredients: enough to make a 3 x 3 x 3 foot pile, or fill a bin.

3 to 4 heaping wheelbarrows of fresh “greens.”

Do not use “Weed & Feed” treated grass clippings.

3 to 4 heaping wheelbarrows of “browns”

Water (from a watering can or hose with spray head)

Steps:

1. Chop or shred coarse materials with a pruner, machete, shovel, lawn mower or shredder.
2. Put roughly equal mix of “greens” and “browns” on a tarp or on the ground.
3. Mix and spray materials with water until they glisten. Or just mix and moisten materials as you fill the bin.

4. Load mix into bin or stack in pile. Repeat until bin is full.
5. Check heat **in middle of pile** by using a compost thermometer or by touch. When pile has heated and starts to cool (5 to 10 days), pull it apart and restack, putting materials from the outside edges into the middle and hot stuff from the middle on the top and sides. Ideally, the middle of the pile should heat up to 110 to 140F—too hot to touch! Moisten as needed to keep everything as moist as a wrung-out sponge. If pile does not heat up, check the Yard Waste Compost Troubleshooting chart.
6. Monitor pile and turn again when it cools. Cover and let cure for a month or more before using. It’s ready when most material is dark, crumbly and sweet-smelling like soil.

Cool and Easy Compost

Built continuously as materials are available. Ready in 6 to 18 months.

Ingredients:

“Green” and “brown” yard trimmings, as available.

Do not use “Weed & Feed” treated grass clippings.

Water (from a watering can or hose with spray head)

Steps:

1. Put yard trimmings in bin as picked up from yard. Mix and moisten dry materials as they are added. Chop tough stalks using a machete or spade.

2. Cover with plastic or bin lid after each addition.
3. Dig into pile occasionally. If materials in the middle of the pile are not decomposing, check the Compost Troubleshooting chart.
4. In 6 to 18 months pull aside fresh materials to harvest dark, crumbly, sweet-smelling finished compost at bottom of pile. Return undecomposed materials to bin.

Yard Waste Compost Troubleshooting

Symptoms	Cause	Solutions
Smells like rotten eggs or garbage	Pile is too wet Food or pet waste in pile	Turn pile and add dry stalks, leaves or straw. Remove food scraps and pet waste.
Pile is dry inside	Not enough water Too much woody material	Turn and moisten materials, cover pile. Mix in fresh greens or nitrogen fertilizer such as urea, blood meal or chicken manure. Chop or remove coarse woody materials.
	Pile is too small	Add material to fill bin or make 3 x 3 x 3 foot pile.
Pile is damp inside, but not composting	Lack of greens	Mix in fresh greens or nitrogen fertilizer. Chop or remove excess woody material.
Pile has shrunken, but looks undecomposed	Outside of pile is dry, inside probably composted	Check in pile for finished compost. Use undecomposed material in new batch.
Clumps of slimy grass, ammonia smell	Too much fresh grass	Leave clippings on lawn, or mix in brown leaves or straw.

SECRETS FOR SUCCESSFUL YARD WASTE COMPOSTING

It's not a secret—simply place garden waste in a pile and bacteria, bugs and fungi will turn it into compost—but it may take a year or longer. For quicker composting, provide the decomposer organisms with proper food and conditions:

1. A balanced diet.

Composting bacteria thrive on a mix of succulent “greens,” like fresh grass clippings, annual weeds, and flowers, and on woodier “browns,” such as autumn leaves and corn stalks. An equal mix of greens and browns works well. Too many greens can produce a smelly, soggy mess. A pile that is mostly browns takes a long time to decompose. The chart below lists common greens and browns.

2. Bite-sized pieces.

Decomposers can break down small pieces quicker than large ones. For rapid composting, chop woody stalks with a shovel or machete, run over them with a lawn mower, or put them through a shredder.

3. Moisture.

Materials should be moist but not dripping wet—like a wrung-out sponge. Spray and mix dry trimmings as they are added to the pile. Keep compost piles in the shade, and cover open piles with plastic.

4. Fresh air.

If materials are too wet or compacted, composting will slow down and may create bad odors. Start with a good mix of materials including some coarse stalks or sticks so air can flow through. Let air into soggy piles by turning them and mixing in coarse stalks or dry straw.

5. Pile size.

A pile that is one cubic yard (3 x 3 x 3 feet) is ideal. Smaller piles dry out quickly, though bins with solid sides and a lid help keep small piles moist. Larger piles may need to be turned to let air into the middle.

6. Preventing pests and other problems.

Use the chart below to avoid materials that may attract pests, create odors or cause other problems.



What can be put in home yard waste compost systems?

DO compost in piles or bins	DO NOT compost at home
Greens Fresh grass clippings Fresh garden trimmings, flowers and plant leaves Barnyard manure (horse, cow, chicken) Garden vegetable leaves and stalks, fallen fruit Weed leaves, stems and flowers House plants and potting mix	Clippings recently treated with “Weed & Feed” or other herbicide - put in curbside yard waste collection. Insect-infested or diseased plants - put in curbside yard waste collection. Pet feces (dog, cat, rodent, exotic bird) - flush down toilet, or wrap in plastic bag and put in garbage. Meat, fish, poultry, dairy products, cooked vegetables and fruit - see page 7. Weed seed heads and roots of spreading weeds like ivy, buttercup, morning glory and quackgrass - put in curbside yard waste collection.
Browns Autumn leaves Twigs and stalks Coarse sawdust or shavings (small amounts) Shredded paper, cardboard, paper towels, napkins or tissues	Large amounts of evergreen leaves, needles or cones Branches over 1/2 inch diameter; berry brambles, rose stems, holly Sawdust from plywood, treated or painted wood Coated photo or copy paper, colored paper, waxed cardboard