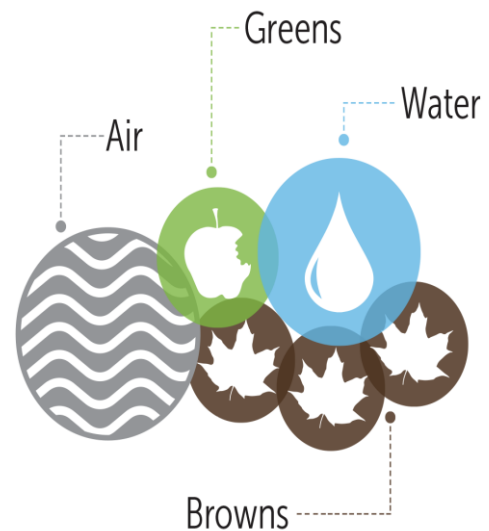


# Composting FAQ'S

## Q. What are the basic ingredients I need for a compost pile?

- **Browns** are carbon-rich, dry, woody materials such as fallen leaves, hay, dried plants, shredded paper and cardboard.
- **Greens** are nitrogen-rich, moist materials such as kitchen scraps and grass clippings. Your "green" material will act as the activator in your pile.
- **Water** your pile until it is moist but not wet, or the consistency of a wrung-out sponge.
- **Air** added to your pile will significantly speed up its decomposition. You can do this by turning or layering with bulky materials to create air spaces between materials.



## Q. What can I put in the compost pile?

Nitrogen-rich materials such as grass clippings, leafy green plants, egg shells, vegetable and fruit waste, pet hair and coffee grounds (green materials). You will also need carbon-rich materials like dry, brown leaves or small bits of twig, shredded paper and cardboard (brown materials). Too much of either one will impede decomposition. Always use the ratio of 3 parts brown to 1 part green material.

**Q. What materials should I not compost?**

- Weeds
- Diseased plants
- Dairy products, meats, bones, fatty or oily food
- Pet Waste
- Shavings and sawdust from treated wood, and other materials containing strong preservatives or other toxins

**Q. Which kinds of pet wastes can be safely composted?**

Wastes from herbivores such as guinea pigs, rabbits, hamsters, or gerbils can be safely composted, along with the wood or paper shavings used in their cages. Droppings from dogs or cats should be avoided because they may contain parasites or pathogens harmful to humans.

**Q. Is newspaper or magazines safe to compost? Are the inks toxic?**

Most newspapers use water or soy-based inks. Although these may contain small amounts of toxic compounds, the trace levels are not of significant toxicological concern. Some caution should still be used with glossy magazines, which sometimes use heavy metal based inks to produce vivid colors. Glossy magazines can also be put in your recycling bin.

**Q. Can I put weeds in my compost heap?**

If your compost pile does not get hot enough, the weed seeds may survive. It's best to leave them out of your compost pile.

## Q. Do I need to shred or grind organic materials to compost them?

Shredding or grinding organic materials helps to speed up the process by increasing the surface area of the material, thereby, making them accessible to decomposers. However, shredding is not required unless you're adding woody material like twigs.



## Q. What are some good composting techniques to use?

**Chop** materials if you want them to breakdown more quickly. The more you chop, the faster the decomposition process will be.

**Mix**, turn or layer brown and green materials to avoid compaction and provide oxygen to the pile. A good rule of thumb for a healthy carbon to nitrogen balance is 3:1. 3 parts brown material to 1 green material.

**Activate** your pile by alternating layers of finished compost, soil, or manure, between brown and green layers to inoculate your pile with beneficial microbes.

**Maintain** the air & water balance by keeping compost as moist as a wrung-out sponge and aerate the pile by turning or creating air shafts. As the pile breaks down, it will shrink to half its original size or less.

**Food Waste** should be covered up with brown materials such as leaves to avoid attracting rodents and fruit flies. Worm bins are ideal for composting vegetable and fruit waste only.

## Q. Do I need to buy a bin to make compost?

It depends on your preference and how much compostable material you generate. If you generate more material than an average household, you can

create your own bin using chicken wire and rot-proof stakes, wooden pallets or cinder blocks. There are other DIY bin options available online.

Reasons for considering a commercial bin include:

- A compost bin (e.g. tumbler) can prevent compost from becoming saturated.
- Containers can help small compost piles retain heat during the winter.
- Containers can help confine your compost pile to a specific part of your yard.
- Some containers are designed to make it easy to turn the organic matter as it composts.
- Containers can help discourage rodents or small animals from grazing on your composting scraps.



### Q. Should I put my compost in the sun or shade?

It's best in the shade because the compost is less likely to dry out.

### Q. Can I just leave a pile in my backyard?

Eventually, all organic material will break down. However, a pile that is not maintained could lead to odors and unwanted pests.



### Q. How can you tell when compost is finished?

Finished compost will no longer heat up, even after mixing. The initial ingredients are no longer recognizable, and what is left is an earthy smelling substance similar to a rich organic soil.

Another way to determine if your compost is ready is the Jar Test. Put some compost in a jar, add water to make it soggy, and seal the jar tightly. Leave it alone for a week, then open the jar carefully. Check for odor. If it smells like wet earth, then the compost is done.

### Q. How long does it take?

Depending on the composting method, it could take a few weeks to a few years to produce compost.

### Q. What are some non-conventional composting methods?

**A. Bokashi** - Bokashi is a form of composting that involves anaerobic composting. Organic material is placed in an air tight container (e.g. two 5-gallon buckets) with an inoculant (available online). The container (being left inside or outside) is left alone for a few weeks to a few months so that the organic material can break down. Any food waste can be used with the Bokashi method. After the leachate is diluted it can be used as fertilizer.



**B. Vermicomposting** - An indoors composting method that involves diverting food and vegetable waste in a worm bin. Red Wigglers, a type of earthworm, digest food waste and create a nutrient-rich compost.

## Q. Can you let leaves stay on your lawn during the fall and winter?

Yes, this is beneficial for your lawn. The leaves will break down faster if you mulch them by running a lawnmower over them.

## Q. How do I know if something is wrong with my composting pile?

**A. Smelly** - Too much green material (particularly wet things like grass clippings) will produce a smelly heap. Spread them around and toss in a thin layer of compost to help things get going; adding more brown material will also help. Turning the pile more often will also help to reduce potential odors.

**B. Not Doing Much** - Too much brown material will just sit there. Chopping up difficult brown elements (e.g. twigs, leaves, cardboard, etc) will speed decomposition and help to aerate the pile. Adding more greens will provide a boost of nitrogen.

**C. Pests** - If you encounter pests you may have meat or dairy pieces in your pile. Food waste should be covered up with dry materials, such as leaves, newspaper or soil to avoid attracting rodents and fruit flies.



## Q. What about flies?

To minimize the number of flies, cover your recently added green material with brown material such as soil, old compost, leaves, or wood shavings.

There are flies that are beneficial and pose little threat. If you spot **Black Solider Fly** larvae in your compost pile, they're actually beneficial and process the nutrients in the food which speeds up the decomposition.