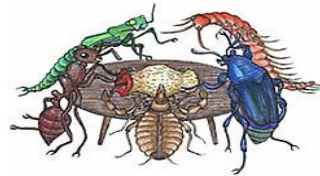


# Backyard Composting

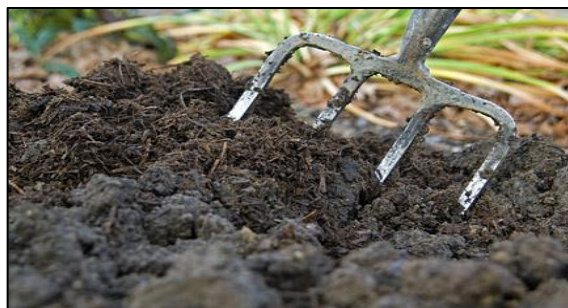
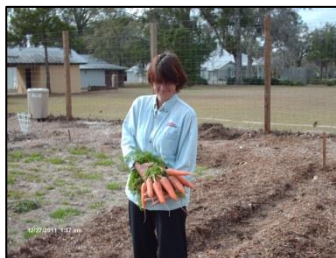
*Help the environment while creating a wonderful, natural fertilizer to help your garden reach its full potential.*

Recycle your yard waste and fruit and vegetable scraps in a compost pile or bin.



Bacteria, fungi, and soil organisms will break down the materials.

Use the finished product in your garden to grow new flowers, fruits, and vegetables. See what an improvement the addition of compost makes!



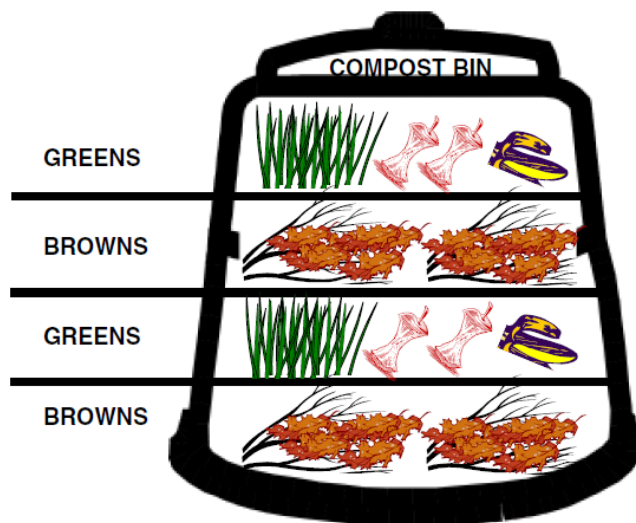
## Composting Tips and Tricks

-Cover your food waste with soil or dry leaves to keep flies and animals away. This will also help mask strong odors.

-Turning the compost pile weekly will help keep animals away.

-If you keep a compost container in your kitchen, a good homemade fly attractant is a bowl of white vinegar with a few drops of dish soap. Instead of going to your food scraps, the flies will be attracted to the vinegar and get trapped in the bowl by the dish soap.

-Alternate adding brown and green materials to your compost pile. This will help maintain a good balance of nitrogen and carbon and keep your compost process running smoothly.



## What Can You Do With Your Compost?

- Add it to your soil as fertilizer for existing plants.
- Mix it with soil for starting seeds.
- Use it as mulch.
- Sprinkle it over new sod to help the seeds germinate.
- Make compost tea as a liquid fertilizer.



## Composting for Beginners

**Location** – Your pile can be built anywhere except up against a structure such as a house or a fence. Locate your pile at least 2 feet from any structure.

**Bins** - Bins are unnecessary; you can build your pile on the ground. However, bins are useful for keeping your pile looking neat, retaining heat and moisture, avoiding the negative effects of wind and weather, and deterring pests.

### **What to Compost** ✓

• Leaves • Grass • Fruit and vegetable scraps • Coffee grounds/filters and tea bags • Other yard waste such as chopped twigs, branches, straw hay, and saw dust.



### **What not to Compost** ⊕

• Meat scraps/bones • Dairy products • Cooking oils or fats • Pet wastes • Disease or insect-infested plants or weeds with seeds.

**Building the Pile** – You can throw in organic materials as they become available. This will result in a very slow decomposition process, but is fine if you are not in a hurry for the finished compost.

For a faster process, use the following steps:

- Wet the ground under the pile.
- Put twigs on the bottom of the pile to provide some aeration at the base.
- Layer the rest of your materials, alternating green layer (for example, freshly mowed grass and kitchen waste) and brown layers. Add water as you go.
- End with a brown layer.

**Monitor the Pile** – Optional step. Check to see that your pile becomes hot within a few days. Also monitor the pile for moisture. When you pick up a handful of material, it should feel like a wrung-out sponge.

**Turn the Pile** – Also an optional step. Turning the pile means stirring it up by some method. Turn the pile to decrease composting time. Once a week to once a month is fine.



# Compost Troubleshooting

Having trouble with your compost? Check out the guide below.



Symptom	Cause	Solution
Pile not heating up	Lack of nitrogen	Add a nitrogen source such as fresh manure, grass clippings, or seed meal. Mix the pile.
	Pile needs to be turned	Mix pile by bringing outside material to the center.
	Low moisture	When watering make sure the moisture gets to the center of the pile. Try poking deep holes into the pile before watering.
	Compost is finished	Finished compost smells earthy rather than rotten or moldy and is dark and crumbly.
Compost is damp and only the center is warm	Pile is too small	Add more compost material.
Unpleasant odor	Too much nitrogen	Add carbon materials such as straw, pine needles, grass clippings, or vegetable trimmings and aerate.
	Compaction	Aerate
	Overwatering	Add dry leaves or wood chips to soak up water.
Attracts rodents, flies, or other animals	Inappropriate materials, or food scraps are too close to the surface of the pile	Bury kitchen scraps near the center of the pile. Don't add inappropriate materials to compost. Switch to a rodent-proof closed bin. In your kitchen, place a container with vinegar to attract fruit flies.

For more information on composting call the Leon County Extension Office at 850-606-5200 or visit the website at <http://leon.ifas.ufl.edu>.

