

Composting at Home

QUICK START GUIDE

Buy or build a container.

Choose a spot.

Criteria: easy access all year round
& free of standing water



..with an open bottom.

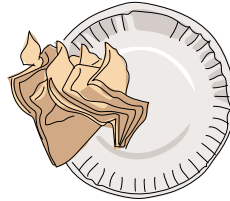
A loose pile will work fine too.

Stock up on browns.

Browns are dry plant materials. To compost year round, you will need to gather a volume of browns roughly the size of your bin or the pile you envision. If using dry leaves this volume assumes you pack them down.

Browns [Carbon]:

- Dry leaves
- Wood chips
- Shredded paper
- Paper towel/toilet paper tubes
- Straw or hay
- Cardboard
- Paper bags
- Sawdust



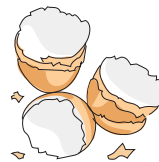
Layer greens with browns.



Now you are ready to start composting! As you have kitchen scraps and fresh yard waste, put them on your pile and cover them with browns.

Greens [Nitrogen]:

- Fruit & vegetable scraps
- Coffee grounds
- Tea bags
- Eggshells
- Plant scraps
- Grass clippings
- Flowers



Recipe: 3 parts carbon: one part nitrogen

Layers should be 4 inches deep or less.

Just as important: Air & Water

- Utilize bulking agents [wood chips, pits, etc]
- Turn the pile with a pitchfork
- Pile should be as moist as a wrung out sponge
- Food scraps
- Watering can or hose

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Backyard Compost Pile Troubleshooting		
Symptoms	Problems	Solutions
Bad Odor	Not enough air, or too much green material	Mix the pile, and/or add in more brown material
Composts too slowly	Not enough water	Moisten and mix pile
Pile is damp and warm only in the center	Pile is too small	Collect more material and mix it into the pile
Pile is damp and sweet smelling, but not heat	Lack of green material	Mix in more green material like fresh grass clippings, yard trimmings, and weeds
Fruit flies	Too much food waste or grass clippings	Mix the pile, add in more brown material to top layer

Do not add:

- Whole branches, logs
- Pet or human waste
- Charcoal briquette ash
- Sawdust from treated wood
- Meat or Dairy
- Invasive plant species

For faster composting...

- Add more nitrogen.
- Chop up thick materials.
- Water your pile as needed to keep it as moist as a wrung-out sponge.
- Stir or turn your pile (not more than once a week) to add air.

Winter, too?

Yes, you can compost right through northern Michigan winters!

The process will slow down, but just keep layering. Be sure to stockpile your browns in the fall!

Are we there yet?

Compost is ready to use when most materials (except sticks and fruit pits) are no longer recognizable.

It will smell like good earth.

Additional Insight:

- Heat is an indicator of biological decomposition - get yourself a thermometer.
- When beginning a new compost pile, a 5 gallon bucket of food scraps (greens) and 20 gallons of leaves (browns) are good starting amounts of each material
- One year after starting your compost pile - move your bin to a new location
- Screening finished compost is an additional step you can take for top tier product