

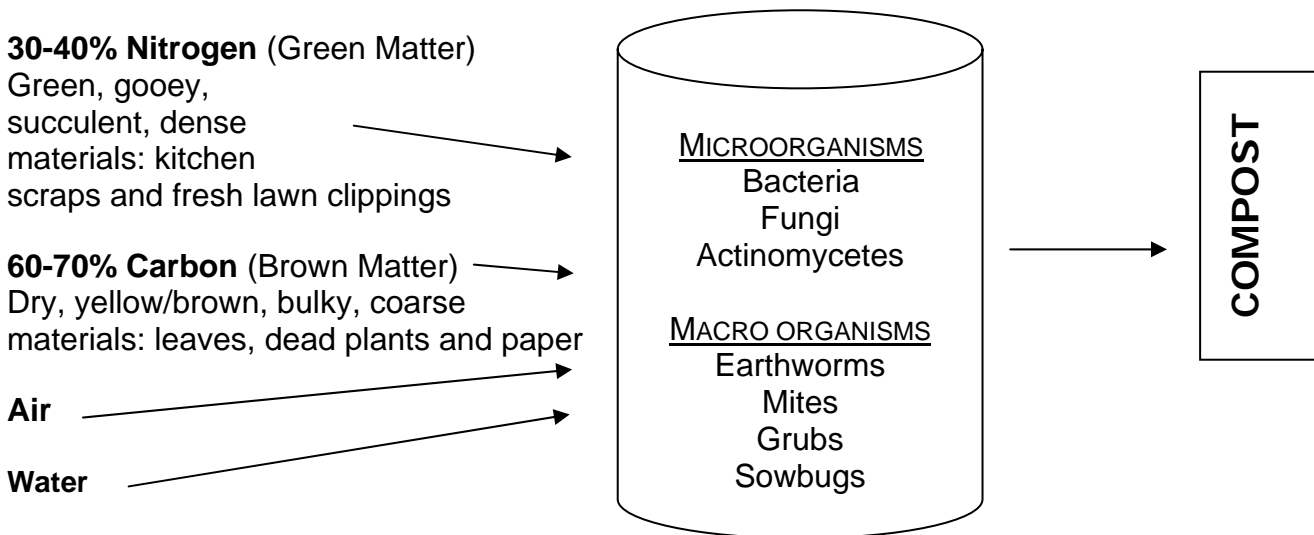
Compost

Like recycling cans, glass, plastic, and paper, plants too can be recycled into compost. Ever smelled the earthy aroma of the forest on a walk through the woods? That smell is the slow decay of leaves, bark, and other plant matter which enrich the forest soil. Dead leaves, pine needles, bark, acorns, and pine cones fall off of the trees onto the forest floor where they are rained upon and shaded by the forest canopy which slows the loss of moisture. Compost is a form of trying to do just what nature does.

Compost is the end product of the decomposition of garden and kitchen waste by bacteria, fungus, and other microscopic organisms. Compost requires 4 elements:

- **Oxygen** (O₂) from the air
- **Nitrogen** (N₂) from kitchen scraps
- **Carbon** (C) from dead leaves
- **Water** (H₂O) from the clouds

When placed together in a pile in the right proportions, this mount of waste will turn into a dark, crumbly additive for the garden. Compost is a gardener's best friend because it is rich in nutrients and minerals that plants love and it is free to make.



DO ADD	DON'T ADD
<p>Do add all kitchen scraps, organic matter, and yard waste:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leaves and Grass Clippings Hay Fruits and Vegetables – peels, seeds and all Egg Shells Newspaper Lint Hair Trimmings Coffee Grounds, Tea leaves, filters and bags Old Cotton Clothing Wood Chips 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No meat or bones. They decompose slowly, smell bad, and attract unwanted animals. • No pet waste • No Glossy, Colored Paper, Magazines, Wrapping Paper, or Construction Paper • No Non-biodegradable Items • No diseased plants.

How to Create a Natural Recycling Bin



Compost piles come in all shapes and sizes.

- Use chicken wire to shape a circular bin.
- Form a giant mound without any enclosure.
- Create a 3 walled square using wood pallets, bricks, or cinder blocks.



The minimum size for a compost pile is 3' x 3' x 3'.

- 1) Form the walls of the pile using chicken wire, wood pallets, cinder blocks or any other material of choice. Make sure to leave an opening for easy access to turn the compost.
- 2) Gather materials. You will need 1-2 parts green matter to 3-4 parts brown matter.
- 3) Build the pile by layering green matter in between layers of brown matter. First spread out a thick layer, 5-6", of brown matter. Top it with a thin layer, 2-3", of green matter. Use a pitchfork to fluff the layers, lightly incorporate the matter, and water thoroughly. Continue layering, fluffing, and watering until you have a pile at least 3' tall. The final layer on the top of the pile should be brown matter.
- 4) Turn the compost pile periodically using a spading fork or shovel. Try to pull matter from the outer edges into the center. Turning the pile will cause the matter to break down faster by allowing air to circulate through, feeding the bacteria and worms.
- 5) It can take anywhere from 2 weeks to 12 months before you have useable compost. Once you can no longer identify the food and yard scraps then you know the compost is ready. Sift the finished matter through a giant screen to remove any large chunks before spreading on the garden. Return the large pieces to the pile for further decomposition.

Problems and Solutions

A compost pile will let you know when there is a problem. A well-balanced pile should be hot and not smell.

PROBLEM	SOLUTION
Compost pile cold, not heating up	Not enough nitrogen (green matter). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add some fresh lawn clippings or food scraps. • Try adding an activator like soil, alfalfa meal, or cottonseed meal. Not enough moisture <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water the pile thoroughly. Not enough oxygen <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a pitchfork to turn the pile. Compost is ready to use.
Compost pile smells	Not enough oxygen <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turn the compost pile Too much nitrogen <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add carbon (brown matter) like leaves, straw, or wood chips
Compost pile is damp and warm only in the center	Pile too small. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gather more materials to make the pile bigger.