

## Harvesting Your Compost

If you can't identify what the material started as, it's time to harvest. Compost is generally ready in three to six months. The pile should be brown, moist, and odor-free. It may also be full of earthworms. You can screen the compost before use if a finer product is desired.



## How to Use Your Compost

**Enrich potting soil:** Mix compost with soil at a 1:3 ratio.

**Top dress houseplants:** Sprinkle ¼" of castings onto soil every six to eight weeks.

**Prepare a lawn or garden:** Mix 1 to 2 inches of compost into the top six inches of soil before planting.

**Revitalize mature shrubs, ornamentals and fruit trees:** Spread 2 to 3 inches of compost around the base of plants.

**Feed your lawn:** Rake a ¼ - ½" layer of compost into your lawn twice a year; water in.

**Brew a nourishing tea:** Mix 10 parts water with 1 part compost. Spray your plants with a potent mix of microbes and micronutrients every time you water.



## Five Great Reasons to Compost Your Yard Trimmings

- 1. Reduce your garbage** - Yard trimmings make up 25 percent of the garbage going to the landfills.
- 2. It's easy** - Setting up a compost pile is simple and inexpensive. Everyone in the family can participate.
- 3. Healthier plants** - Recycle yard trimmings into a rich soil conditioner. Compost is full of valuable nutrients that help to improve garden soil.
- 4. Conserve water** - Compost spread around landscape and plants helps soil retain moisture and reduces watering needs.
- 5. Clean the air** - Less garbage means fewer truckloads to the landfill and reduced air pollution from truck and landfill emissions.

## Questions?

**Contact:** Sustainability & Environmental Services (972) 769-4130

**Visit:** [www.livegreeninplano.com](http://www.livegreeninplano.com)

**Enroll:** Schedules and registration at [www.livegreeninplano.com](http://www.livegreeninplano.com)

**Read:** *The Complete Compost Gardening Guide*. Barbara Pleasant. Storey Publications, North Adams, MA. 2008. *The Rodale Book of Composting*. Rodale Press, Emmaus, PA. 1992



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# Don't Throw it Compost it



## Getting Started



## Building a Compost Pile

### You will need:

#### Materials:

Green (nitrogen) and brown (carbon) materials. These are the essential nutrients for the microbes that break down the compost materials.

#### Mass:

1 cubic yard (3' x 3' x 3') of space is minimum for optimal decomposition.

#### Moisture:

About 50 percent, or the consistency of a damp, wrung-out sponge.

#### Air:

Keeps the microbes alive and prevents the pile from going anaerobic and becoming smelly.

#### Time:

Decomposition takes time. A finished compost product will eventually appear. How long it takes is up to you.

- 1 Choose a flat location with good drainage and easy access to water.
- 2 Buy or build a bin or enclosure. The ideal size is 3' x 3' x 3'.
- 3 Start with a 3 to 4 inch layer of brown leaves or other carbon material.
- 4 Alternate with a 3 to 4 inch layer of green grass clippings or other nitrogen material.
- 5 Water each layer as you build it.
- 6 Continue alternating layers of brown and green material.
- 7 Finish with a layer of brown (carbon-based) material.
- 8 Turn the compost pile weekly for the first four weeks, adding water if dry. Turn irregularly after first month until all materials have composted.
- 9 Harvest and use the finished compost.

## What's In and What's Out of the Outdoor Bin

GREENS (nitrogen)
Fresh grass clippings
Flower parts and green plant trimmings
Houseplants
Pet hair
Coffee grounds
Tea leaves
Cottonseed meal
Dried molasses
BROWNS (carbon)
Dried leaves
Dried grass clippings
Straw
Cornstalks
Brown paper bags (shredded)
Paper towels and napkins
Dryer lint
Bark
DO NOT COMPOST
Bones, meat or fish scraps
Grease, fat or oils
Fruits or vegetables
Dairy products
Pet feces
Weed seeds
Diseased plants



## For Faster Results

- Reduce the particle size by chopping, grinding, or shredding the material.
- Turn the pile more frequently.
- Maintain the optimum moisture level (damp like a wrung-out sponge).

## Problems?

Problem	Cause	Solution
Odor	Not enough oxygen Pile is too wet Pile is compacted	Turn pile. Add coarse, dry materials like leaves or straw. Your compost bin should smell earthy like the forest floor.
Pile is dry	Not enough water Too much carbon material	Turn pile and moisten with water. Add fresh green (nitrogen-based) material like grass clippings.
Pile is not hot	Pile may be too small Pile may lack nitrogen Compost may be finished	Gather enough material to create a pile 3'x3'x3'. Mix in fresh grass clippings, used coffee grounds or dried molasses. If it looks dark and crumbly and smells clean and earthy, harvest and use the finished compost.
Pile attracts vermin, flies or pests	Food scraps	Avoid using food scraps. Compost food scraps in an enclosed bin with worms.