

Compost Basics

Bacteria are the workhorses of the compost pile. They are present on leaves, grass and other yard materials, even in the air. They start the break down process so larger decomposers can finish the job.

Bacteria need:

1. **Food:** compost piles needs equal weights of:
Carbon + **Nitrogen**
(brown dried plant material) (Green plant material or other nitrogen)
2. **Water:** compost piles need to be kept as damp as a wrung out sponge.
3. **Oxygen:** Turning your compost pile adds needed oxygen and speeds up decomposition.

Fast Track Soil Enhancer Compost

Finished compost will take between 6 weeks and 12 months

1. Make a thick layer of coarse organic material: sticks, corn stalks (This layer is optional)
2. Layer approximately equal weights of brown (carbon) & green (nitrogen) yard materials.

Water each layer as pile is built.

Finish off pile with brown layer of dried plant material.

Hints: *Chopping materials up first will speed up composting. Use a lawnmower, shredder or machete.*

Some recipes add an inch of soil or finished compost after each layer of brown and green. This will add extra microorganisms but is not necessary. There are enough microbes already present on yard materials to inoculate the pile.

3. Turn pile every week or two to add oxygen.
4. Water layers of pile as it's turned. Keep pile damp as a wrung out sponge.

Finished compost will take between 6 weeks and 12 months, depending on how often you turn it and water it to keep the pile moist. Mixing equal weights of brown and green yard materials is also important. Balance is important.

Uses for Compost

- Soil additive: dig in or side-dress plants
- Mulch: 2-3 inches around flowers, vegetables, trees and shrubs
- Mix your own potting soil: 1 part peat moss, 1 part perlite, 1 part mature compost OR 2 parts soilless mixture and 1 part compost OR 2 parts garden loam, 1 part sharp sand, 1 part compost (no more than 33% compost)
- Compost Tea: soak bag of compost in water, use liquid to water yard, garden and houseplants.

Handout available at:

<http://www.spuuf.org/socialaction.htm>