



## A GUIDE TO COMPOSTING

Compost is nature's process of recycling decomposed organic materials into a rich soil. It can greatly improve the quality of soil by improving drainage and moisture absorption. By Composting organic waste, people are returning nutrients back into the soil allowing for the cycle of life to continue and your garden to thrive.

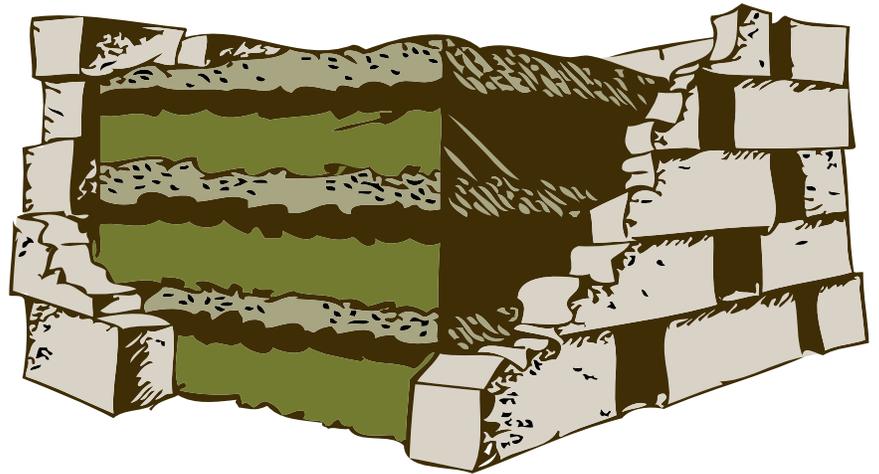
### HOW TO MAKE YOUR OWN PILE

Bin, Pile, or Barrel? Composting can happen anywhere organic material is allowed to decompose together. It is important to identify the best method for you to compost. Many individuals gather their compost into a pile or a shallow pit for their composting needs. Boxes and bins are helpful because they help protect the decomposing nutrients from animals. Boxes can be made with wood, snow fencing, and/or chicken wire. Containers for compost can have 1-3 compartments. As the nutrients near mid- or total decomposition, the pile is moved over to the next bin and a new pile is begun. Single bin compost systems undergo the whole process in the same compartment.

### WHAT MAKES A GOOD COMPOST PILE

Oxygen, moisture, variety and agitation are all helpful things to keep in mind when making a pile. The air and water content must be balanced so that the decomposition process remains aerobic. Stirring and turning the pile occasionally allows more oxygen to enter and organic material to decompose faster. A moist pile is also key to good compost (40-60 % saturation).

The location you choose can help or hurt the outcome of your compost. Select a



shady, or partly shady spot near a water source for your compost pile or bin. Ideally, the compost pile should be 3'x3'x3' and easily accessible. It is important that the pile not be exposed to high winds (which will cool it down), more than half a day's sunlight (which will dry it out), or is completely sheltered from rain (a good source of moisture).

But what is the most important to a compost pile are the ingredients. There needs to be a balance of nitrogen and carbon for the aerobic organisms in the organic material. Typically this is about 4 parts browns (carbon source) to 1 part greens (nitrogen source).

**Greens:** Microorganisms use nitrogen from the green to build cell structure. Add: green grass clippings; fresh manure (from herbivores only); kitchen scraps (no meat or dairy); green leaves; soft garden prunings; hair; coffee grounds; tea bags; used potting soil.

**Browns:** The carbon and air in brown materials balance the green material. The carbon is used by the microorganisms for energy. Add: dry brown leaves; dried grass; shredded corn stalks; straw; sawdust; shredded paper; shredded cardboard; small twigs; dryer lint; nuts and shells.

### ABOUT MULCH

Compost adds nutrients to the soil, but it does not discourage weed growth or protect the roots of plants.



## ABOUT MULCH CONT.

Many kinds of mulch provide a creative way to reuse materials readily available. Mulch is less decomposed than compost, which allows it to retain more moisture and discourage weed growth.

**Wood Mulch:** Wood chips from local trees can make some of the best mulch for growing gardens. Local wood chips are often free and encourage the use of natural resources. Wood chips dissolve slowly into the soil because of their natural resistance to decomposition. However, as they decompose they naturally release nutrients to the soil. Wood chips also absorb water and slowly return it to the soil. They act as a buffer between the soil and the environment by protecting it from sharp temperature changes and harsh, dry spells. They have been proven helpful in reintroducing native species to urban environments.

**Leaf Mulch:** Using the leaves from your own yard to help with a weed problem prevents individuals from sending more leaves to the landfill and saves on the cost of wood mulch for many landowners. Leaves smother weeds well and help to hold in soil moisture. Although the leaves do not look like typical mulch, they provide a unique way to return nutrients to the soil.

## GO COMPOST!

Now you can begin collecting your greens and browns to create your own compost pile. Composting can take anywhere from a month to two years depending on the environment that it is placed in. For more information on how to properly manage your compost pile and other gardening resources, check out the Gateway Greening website for more tips on composting: [www.gatewaygreening.org](http://www.gatewaygreening.org)

