

Earth Mix with all the Trimmings

8 Easy Steps to Making Compost

1. Pick at least a 4-ft. shaded area where water does not collect when it rains.
2. Cover half the area with a 6 inch layer of leaves. Water thoroughly.
3. Add a 2 inch layer of grass clippings and/or fruit and vegetable scraps and add a dash of soil.
4. Mix this layer lightly into the layer below it with a hoe or cultivator. Water thoroughly.
5. Top with a 2 inch layer of leaves.
6. Repeat steps 3 through 5 as ingredients are available. Note: The top layer of the completed pile should be at least 4 inches of leaves covering all food materials. Build the pile to 3 ft. x 3 ft. x 3 ft. high as soon as you can.
7. Turn the whole pile over with a hay-fork or shovel every 2 to 3 weeks, adding water as needed to make the whole pile moist like a wrung-out sponge.
8. Compost is well done when most of the original ingredients have broken down and when it smells like rich soil.



Compost Troubleshooting

Composting is beneficial to your landscaping and the environment. You will find that some composting issues can be easily solved by taking a few simple steps.

SYMPTOMS	PROBLEMS	EASY SOLUTIONS
The heap is wet & smells like rotten eggs.	Not enough air; pile too wet	Turn it; add coarse dry materials such as straw or cornstalks.
The center is dry and contains tough woody wastes.	Not enough water in the pile or too woody	Turn and moisten; add fresh green wastes; chop or shred.
The heap is damp & warm right in the middle; but nowhere else.	Pile is too small or too dry	Collect more material and mix into new pile; moisten.
The heap is damp & sweet smelling, but will not heap up.	Lack of nitrogen in the pile. Or your compost is done!	Mix in fresh grass clippings or nitrogen fertilizer.
Matted, non-decomposed leaves or grass clippings.	Compaction, poor aeration or lack of moisture	Avoid thick layers of leaves, grass or paper. Break up layers with garden fork, then wet and re-mix the pile. Shred materials.
Odor like ammonia.	Not enough carbon	Add "brown" materials and aerate. If odor is intense, possibly cover and allow pile to mellow before turning.
Attracts rats, raccoons, dogs, flies or other pests.	Inappropriate materials (meat, oil, bones, etc.) or food too close to surface	Dispose of meat and oil. Use a rodent-resistant bin. Bury kitchen scraps 8 to 12 inches deep in the pile.
Infested with fire ants.	Too dry, not hot enough, or food too close to surface	Drench ant mounds with compost tea sweetened with feed grade molasses. Broadcast low toxicity fire ant bait for major infestations. Carefully rebuild pile to proper conditions, wetting thoroughly.

Source: TCEQ "A Green Guide to Yard Care"



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