

Composting Basics

Types of Composting

- **Hot** composting occurs when the compost stays above about 90°F (32°C), allowing aerobic bacteria to thrive, killing most pathogens and seeds, and rapidly producing usable compost.
- **Cold** composting occurs in many domestic garden compost bins in which temperatures never reach above 86°F or 30°C. If you put kitchen scraps in the garden compost bin and leaving them untended, you're cold composting. Cold compost, because it has a very high moisture content and doesn't get active aeration, is likely to turn anaerobic and may not smell very good, though it will produce compost, after a while. This process can be improved by adding some wood chips or small pieces of bark, leaves, twigs, or a combination of these materials, throughout the mixture, helping to improve drainage and airflow.

Building the Pile

- **Organic materials:** A good mix consists of between 2/3 and ¾ parts "browns" and between 1/3 and ¼ part "greens". See the table for examples.
- **Moisture:** Composting materials should feel moist but not overly soggy, like a wrung out sponge.
- **Temperature:** Hot compost should feel warm to the touch.
- **Air:** Compost should be turned regularly to ensure that air is reaching the center of the pile to prevent unpleasant odors that can occur when materials decompose without oxygen.

How to Tell Browns from Greens

Browns	Greens
Leaves	Grass
Dead Plants	Green Weeds
Straw	Manure
Shredded Paper	Alfalfa or Clover
Shredded Twigs	Seaweed or Pond Algae
Pine Needles	Non-Meat and Non-Dairy Kitchen Scraps
Sawdust from Untreated Wood	

Don't Compost

- Diseased plants or leaves
- Persistent weeds (poison ivy, multiflora rose, bindweed, quackgrass, etc.)
- Human or pet feces.
- Meat, dairy products and kitchen vegetables cooked with animal fats.
- Plants that have gone to seed.
- Trimmings from bushes and shrubs are usually not suitable for composting.