



Composting 101

Composting Basics

Composting is a fast, easy, and inexpensive way to build topsoil for your garden. You can dispose of grass clippings and yard waste and gain a valuable soil additive at the same time. Composting is simply a way to speed up the natural process in which soil microorganisms break down dead plant and animal materials, releasing their elements back to the soil. Adding compost to your garden can improve the texture of heavy clay soil.

EASY 4-STEP METHOD:

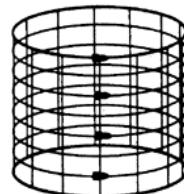
CHOOSE A SITE: The best location for your compost pile is on bare soil with good drainage, some sun, near the garden and within reach of a hose.

MAKE THE PILE: Put down a base layer of wood chips or fine sticks and dry leaves, then alternate 6" layers of damp, green materials (weeds, grass clippings) with layers of dry brown material (leaves, straw, wood chips). Sprinkle a little soil or lawn type fertilizer between layers. The pile should be at least 4' high and 4' wide when you finish adding clippings. Water it lightly to the consistency of a wrung out sponge.

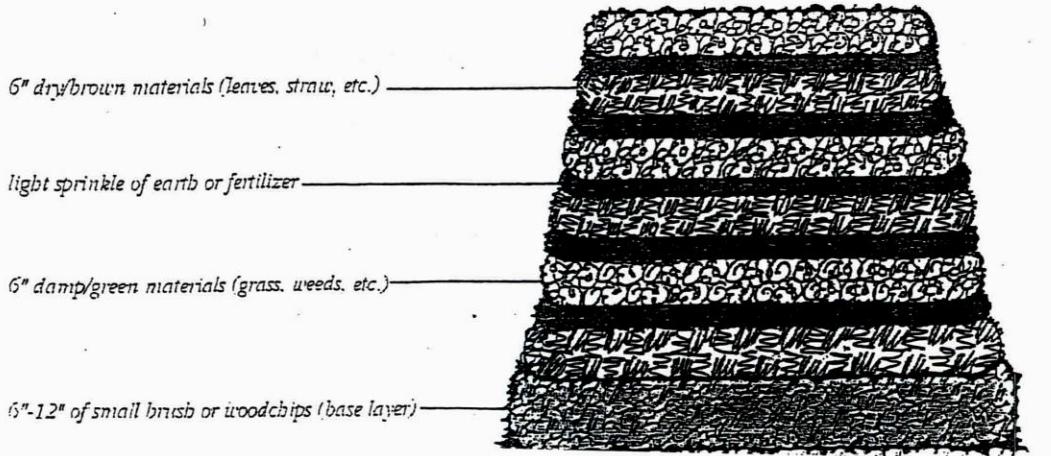
TURN THE COMPOST: After the pile has been in place for 1-2 weeks; turn the whole thing over with a pitchfork, mixing well. Turn the pile at least twice more at 2-3 week intervals. If the weather is hot and sunny, water it lightly to keep it moist.

DIG THE COMPOST INTO YOUR GARDEN: When the compost is dark, crumbly, and uniform in texture it is ready to use in the garden. Till it into beds before planting flowers or vegetables, or use it to mulch around plants.

Free online OSU extension factsheet: <http://ohioline.osu.edu/hyg-fact/1000/1189.html>



THE ANATOMY OF A WELL-MADE COMPOST PILE:



MATERIALS WHICH CAN BE COMPOSTED:

Damp/Green Materials

Grass clippings
Weeds
Fruit and vegetables peels and trimmings
Leaves
Spent flowers
Most garden trimmings

Dry/Brown Materials

chipped brush
autumn leaves
straw
coffee grounds
tea leaves
last year's garden plants

MATERIALS THAT CAN BE ADDED IN SMALL AMOUNTS TO SPEED THINGS UP:

Nitrogen fertilizers
Cow, horse, chicken manure
Commercial compost starters
Bone meal

MATERIALS THAT SHOULD NOT BE COMPOSTED:

Meat scraps
Pet litter
Diseased plant parts
Thorny stems
Metal, plastic and glass
Scrap wood & branches > 1/2" thick

OTHER METHODS OF COMPOSTING:

Here at Franklin Park we use the simplest method- the compost pile. There are many bins and tumblers commercially available if you prefer a more "contained" look for your compost area. Other methods of composting include sheet composting and worm composting. For more detailed and in-depth instructions on making compost in your own back yard, the following sources are recommended.

Two really helpful books on composting at home are:

Let It Rot! The Gardener's Guide to Composting, by Stu Campbell.
Copyright 1990, published by Storey Communications, Inc.

Compost This Book! by Tom Christopher and Marty Asher.
Copyright 1994, A Sierra Club Book.