

# "HOT & FAST" COMPOST

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**COOK TIME:** Approximately 6-12 weeks

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## TOOLS

- Pitchfork or shovel
- Equipment for chopping and shredding (e.g. hand pruners)
- Water hose with spray head
- Compost bin unit or pile location (ideally 1 cubic yard)
- Compost thermometer
- Storage containers to hold browns and greens prior to pile assembly (e.g. wire or green plastic mesh 'corral', plastic container, 5-gallon bucket)
- Compost sifter (optional)

## INGREDIENTS

1 part nitrogen-rich material ("greens")

- Fruit & vegetable scraps
- Fresh grass clippings and yard trimmings

Water

2-3 parts carbon-rich material ("browns")

- Dried leaves and grass
- Hay and sticks
- Newspaper

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Choose a location for your compost pile or bin. When selecting a site, consider the following criteria:
  - a. Sun (choosing a site in the sun speeds up the composting process)
  - b. A space that is easily accessible, flat, and at least 1 cubic yard in size
  - c. Protection from strong winds; (d) access to water source; and (e) respectful distance from neighbors.
2. If desired, designate separate containers for storing/accumulating greens and browns prior to assembling your compost pile.
3. Place a pallet or base layer of twigs/straw-like material on the bottom of the composting bin to help aerate the pile from below.
3. Chop or shred coarse materials larger than ½" in diameter or 2 inches in size to increase surface area and speed up decomposition. Leaves will break down more quickly if shredded with a rotary lawn mower or shredder.
4. Lay 4-6" layers of materials in the bin, alternating between brown and green materials. Do this until the pile is 3-4 feet high.
  - a. The pile shouldn't be too tall. Piles larger than 5 feet tall and wide tend to compact and need to be turned to keep their centers from going anaerobic.



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# INSTRUCTIONS (CONT.)

- b. Food scraps should be buried at least 8-12 inches down from the top of the pile. Sawdust, leaves, straw, or compost can be placed on top of the food scraps to help absorb odors.
6. Add water as needed. The moisture level of the pile should be as damp as a wrung-out sponge. (Squeezing a handful of the material should yield one or two drops of water.)
7. If desired, add a small amount (up to ½ shovelful) of finished compost or soil to the compost pile to help introduce microorganisms to the pile.
8. Within a few days, the pile should begin to heat up. Monitor the temperature carefully using the compost thermometer. After the pile has heated and starts to cool (about one week), turn it. Move materials from the edge and top of the pile into the middle. Add water if needed. Turn the pile sooner if the temperature at the center of the pile goes above 150°F.
9. During the first few weeks of composting, the pile temperature should continue to be hot. Turn the pile when the temperature surpasses 150°F in order to cool it off. If the pile goes above that temperature, many beneficial microorganisms will die. More nitrogen-rich “greens” or water may be needed if the pile does not reach at least 120°F by the second week. At the second turning (about one week after the first), the material should start turning coffee-brown in color and be uniformly moist.
10. Activity in the pile will slow down after microorganisms utilize the easily decomposable material. Less heat will be generated and the pile will begin cooling off. Turn the pile periodically to ensure adequate aeration (no more than once a week). As the composting process continues, the pile will eventually reduce to about ⅓ of its original height.
11. The finished compost should look like dark, crumbly soil mixed with small, unrecognizable pieces of organic material. It should have a sweet, earthy smell. The pile temperature should be within 10°F of ambient air temperature.
12. Use the compost sifter to sift finished compost, so that smaller particles fall through, while larger particles stay on top of the screen. Large pieces can be returned to the pile to finish composting or used to start a new pile.
13. Let compost cure for at least three weeks before using, longer for seedlings and transplants. If compost is not cured long enough, it can be toxic to plants, especially young ones. Unfinished compost will also temporarily rob soil of its nitrogen which can harm plants. ☀

Scan here for more info on composting:



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