

SOCWA PUBLIC INFORMATION BULLETIN

HOME COMPOSTING: TURN YARD WASTE INTO GARDENER'S GOLD

Through the natural process of composting, leaves and grass clippings from your yard can be transformed into a soil-enriching substance called compost. The steps for making compost outlined here reflect the experience of volunteer Master Composters working in Southeast Oakland County.

Materials for Composting

To avoid nuisances and odors, select the materials for your compost pile with care. Check with your Department of Public Works for specific home composting regulations.

Good materials for composting:

- Grass clippings
- Leaves – shredded if possible
- Spent flowers & garden clippings
- Young weeds (without seeds)
- Hedge trimmings
- Fruit & vegetable peelings
- Lettuce leaves
- Coffee grounds, filters and tea bags
- Fertilizer
- Soil or compost

Do not compost the following:

- Dairy products
- Oils and fats
- Meat, fish, bones
- Pet manure; cat litter
- Cooked food
- Diseased plants
- Black walnut leaves
- Bread
- Weeds with seeds
- Invasive weeds

For an **IDEAL** composting mix, combine shredded leaves (50% of total volume), green grass clippings (25% of total volume) and soil or compost (25% of total volume). Start with available yard clippings and add other materials, as needed, to balance the pile.

The “green” materials have a high nitrogen content which typically causes the pile to heat up and decompose more quickly. To avoid odors, make sure that green materials are mixed thoroughly with brown materials and soil.

Building the Compost Pile

To build the pile, following these steps:

1. Start with a layer of organic materials such as shredded leaves, grass or other garden debris.
2. Water the layer until it is as moist as a wrung-out sponge.
3. Add 2”-3” of soil or compost – to provide microorganisms.
4. If possible, mix all materials together as you build the pile.
5. Continue the process of adding organic materials, soil and water until the bin is filled. Add grass clippings in small amounts and mix in thoroughly.
6. Water each layer...and check moisture periodically. Build the pile to a size of 3 feet x 3 feet x 3 feet or slightly larger – or fill the compost bin.

Turning the Pile

Turning and mixing the compost pile with a pitchfork or compost turner adds oxygen and accelerates the rate of decomposition. The pile may be turned once a week, once a month, several times a year, or not at all. If the pile is mixed from time-to-time and kept moist, finished compost is usually available in six to nine months. Don’t worry about the temperature of the pile – either hot or cold composting yields beneficial compost.

NOTE: FOR INFORMATION ABOUT HOME COMPOSTING WORKSHOPS, CONTACT THE SOCWA HEALTHY LAWN AND GARDEN PROGRAM AT 248-288-5150 WEEKDAYS.

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