

A Guide on How to Prepare Compost



Step #1 - Establishing the First Layer

Begin your compost pile by laying down a foundation of soil mixed with brown organic materials, such as straw, sawdust, or dried leaves, to a thickness of approximately 10 to 15 centimeters.

This base layer helps absorb excess moisture and houses microorganisms essential for composting.

Step #2 - Creating the Second Layer

Add a layer of green waste on top of the first layer. Green waste includes materials like vegetable scraps, fruit peels, tea bags, and coffee grounds, which should measure around 3 to 5 inches thick.

This layer is rich in nitrogen, an essential element that aids in decomposing organic matter.

Step #3 - Adding the Third Layer

Continue by adding another layer of brown materials, such as additional sawdust or dried leaves. This layer should also be about 3 to 5 inches thick.

Brown materials are rich in carbon, which balances the nitrogen-rich greens and helps control odors and moisture levels within the compost.

Step #4 - Repeating Layers

As you accumulate more organic waste, continue to add alternating layers of green and brown materials.

It's important to maintain the balance between these materials to ensure efficient composting.

Regularly sprinkle water over each new layer to keep the compost moist but be careful to avoid waterlogging, which can slow down the composting process and lead to odor issues.

Step #5 - Mixing the Layers

Periodically, use a garden spade or a similar tool to turn and mix the compost layers.

This activity is crucial as it introduces oxygen into the pile, which is needed by aerobic bacteria to break down the organic matter effectively.

Mixing also helps to evenly distribute moisture and heat, further speeding up the decomposition process.

Step #6 - Applying the Final Covering

Once your compost bin is nearly full, or when you decide to stop adding new materials, cover the topmost layer with a mix of soil and brown materials.

This final covering helps to insulate the pile and prevents the attraction of pests like flies and rodents.

Place a mesh cover over the container. This cover will deter pests and animals from disturbing the compost while allowing air to continue circulating, which is vital for composting.

Required Materials for Composting

Container Selection

Choose a plastic bin or box that is specifically designed with features for drainage and airflow. These features are critical as they ensure excess water can escape, preventing waterlogging, while also providing enough air circulation to aid in the aerobic decomposition process. The size of the container will depend on the amount of organic waste you anticipate generating.

Soil and Water Usage

Soil plays a dual role in composting. It introduces beneficial microorganisms that help break down organic matter, and it helps regulate the moisture within the compost pile. Water is equally essential but should be used judiciously. The goal is to keep the compost moist like a wrung-out sponge, as too much water can suffocate the microbes needed for composting, and too little can halt their activity.

Garden Waste

Adding grass clippings and fallen leaves is an excellent way to introduce nitrogen (from green clippings) and carbon (from dried leaves) into your compost. These elements are vital for the microbes in the compost to thrive and work efficiently.

Protective Gear

Always wear gloves when handling compost materials. Gloves protect your hands from potential irritants or sharp objects within the compost materials and help maintain hygiene as you handle decomposing organic waste.

Watering Tools

Keep a garden watering can close at hand. This tool will help you add just the right amount of water to your compost, ensuring it stays at the optimal moisture level to facilitate decomposition without becoming soggy.

Digging Tool

A garden spade is indispensable for composting. It is used for turning and mixing the compost, which is essential for aerating the pile and distributing moisture and heat evenly through the compost.

Covering

Use a mosquito net or a similar mesh to cover your compost. This cover is crucial as it prevents pests such as rodents and flies from entering the compost, while still allowing air to flow, which is vital for the composting process.

Organic Material Classification

Greens

These are nitrogen-rich materials from your kitchen, such as vegetable and fruit scraps, tea bags, and used paper napkins. They are essential for accelerating the composting process because they break down quickly.

Browns

These are carbon-rich materials like sawdust, straw, and dried leaves collected from your garden. Browns help to add bulk and structure to the compost, which aids in air circulation and absorbs excess moisture.

Materials to Avoid in Compost

Animal Waste

It is important to avoid adding excrement from carnivorous animals such as dogs and cats to your compost. These types of waste can contain pathogens that are harmful to humans and do not break down well in a typical backyard composting environment. Including them can also lead to odors that attract pests.

Unhealthy Plants

Refrain from composting diseased plant materials. These can carry viruses, fungi, or bacteria that might not be killed during the composting process, potentially spreading disease to other plants when the compost is used as soil amendment.

Non-Biodegradable Substances

Oils, fats, and dairy products should not be added to compost. These materials do not break down easily and can create odor problems and attract pests like rodents and flies. Additionally, they can upset the moisture balance within the compost pile.

Tree Trimmings

Be cautious with grass clippings and pruned branches from trees, especially those treated with pesticides or herbicides. These chemicals can persist in your compost and may harm the microbial

life that is essential for composting. They can also end up contaminating the soil and plants where the compost is eventually applied.

Animal Products

Exclude all meat, bones, or fish scraps from your compost. These materials decompose very slowly and are likely to produce odors that attract pests. Furthermore, they can harbor harmful bacteria or other pathogens, posing a health risk.