



Garden Notes

GN 142

COMPOSTING TIPS AND TRICKS

TIP #1: Browns (carbon rich materials) and greens (nitrogen rich materials) need to be balanced.

Tricks:

- Too much green material will give off an ammonia odor; add browns and turn the pile.
- A cool pile, or one that is not decomposing, needs more greens.
- Store those mountains of dried fallen leaves in large plastic bags, adding them to the pile over the spring and summer as you need browns.
- Alfalfa pellets, and blood meal, cottonseed meal, feather meal or fish meal will heat up the pile quickly if you're short on greens.

TIP #2: Size matters.

Tricks:

- Ideal compost pile size is 3-by-3-by-3-feet to 5-by-5-by-5-feet.
- Chop greens and browns into 1½ to 2 inch pieces to speed up the compost process.

TIP #3: Keep the pile as moist as a wrung out sponge.

Tricks:

- Keep a garden hose with a spray nozzle handy as you turn the pile. Water the pile after turning a few forkfuls. Water added to the top of a pile just runs off.
- If the pile is too wet, turn it.
- Cover the pile during heavy rains.

TIP #4: Protect the pile. Skunks, raccoons, rodents and pets are attracted to compost piles.

Tricks:

- Line and cover the bin with ¼ inch hardware cloth.
- Bury kitchen scraps 6 to 12 inches into the pile.
- Meat, fish, poultry, bones, dairy products and oils do not belong in the compost pile.

TIP #5: Turn, turn, turn.

Tricks:

- Once a pile is built turning it every 3 to 4 days for a week or so will jumpstart the compost process.
- Weekly turning thereafter keeps the compost process humming.

TIP #6: Some plant matter does NOT belong in the compost pile.**Tricks:**

- Wait two mowings before adding herbicide/ pesticide treated grass clippings to the pile.
- Weeds gone to seed, pest infested and diseased plants, oxalis, and Bermuda grass go into the green waste can.
- Herbicide treated plants/weeds can be composted, allowing one year for the chemicals to decompose before adding the compost to the garden.

TIP #7: Materials decompose at different rates.**Trick:**

- Sift finished compost over $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ inch hardware cloth into a wheelbarrow. This separates the finished and unfinished materials; unfinished materials can go back in the pile.

TIP #8: Compost piles are filled with bacteria, fungi, insects and nematodes; they are the decomposers.**Tricks:**

- Wear gloves when handling compost.
- Wash your hands thoroughly after working with compost.

TIP #9: Compost has a wonderful earthy aroma.**Tricks:**

- A pile that smells foul is telling you something is wrong. Ammonia smells indicate too much nitrogen (like mats or clumps of grass). A rotten smell indicates the wrong materials have been added, the pile is too wet, or there isn't enough air in the pile. Turn the pile, adding browns.
- Bury those kitchen scraps and dropped fruit from your trees.
- Balance excess fruit with browns to avoid fermenting fruit.

TIP #10: Compost happens.**Trick:**

- Have fun with your pile!