



# Starting a Compost Pile

Composting is a great way to keep organic waste out of landfills, while lowering gas emissions associated with waste management. It's fun, easy and saves money in garbage disposal, fertilizers, mulch and soil!

## **Step 1: Choose a location and type of holding unit for your compost pile.**

A good location is not too far from your house. The heat generated from your compost pile is a byproduct of microbial decomposition, not the sun. Keeping your pile in a relatively shady area will help to keep your pile from drying out.

If you live in an urbanized area, think about getting a bin that is enclosed. It will help keep unwanted animals out of your compost piles.



Soil Savers can be purchased at RI Resource Recovery. 942-1430 [www.rirc.org](http://www.rirc.org)



Compost bins can easily be constructed out of pallets or wood.

## **Step 2: Learning the Compost Recipe**

Learning to blend materials together is the art of composting. Stick to a ratio of 3 parts brown (carbon) to 1 part green (nitrogen). It's best to fill your compost bin completely with brown material and layer in green material. Your compost pile will reduce a third in volume in approximately one week. Every time you put green material into your compost bin, cover them up with a good amount of brown material.



A scrap pail with a carbon filter is an easy way to collect fresh food scraps. These can also be purchased at RI Resource Recovery.

### **Greens**

Fresh fruit & veg. scraps, non-diseased expired plants, manure, coffee grinds & filter, tea bags, chemical-free grass clippings, etc.

**It's best to shred, cut and chop both green & brown materials before putting in your pile.**

### **Browns**

Fall leaves, straw, corn & tomato stalks, newspaper & cardboard, wood chips, pine needles, bark, woody prunings, etc.

**TURN OVER** →

### Step 3: Learning What Not to Compost

Items that shouldn't be composted include; meat, bones, fat, grease, oils, peanut butter, dairy products, cooked foods with sauces or butter, dog and cat manure, cat litter, diseased plants, weeds gone to seed, weeds that spread by roots and runners (vines), invasive plant species, chemically treated grass or plants, poisonous plants and inorganic wastes (metal, plastic, glass).

### Step 4: Adding Oxygen & Moisture

Oxygen is required by the microorganisms working in your pile to live and function. It will also keep your compost pile smell-free! You should infuse your compost pile 1-3 times a week (less in the winter) with either a pitch fork, metal bar or a compost aerator. Simply plunge your tool into your pile and move back and forth to allow the oxygen to distribute.



Your compost pile should always feel like a damp wrung out sponge. If it's too dry, add some water or take the top off if it's going to rain. If it's too wet, add brown material or take the top off and let the water evaporate.

### Step 5: Harvesting Compost

In general it will take about a year for the compost process to completely finish. After about 5-7 months from starting a pile, you should start to see compost being formed. This is a good time to turn your pile completely to give all materials a chance to be in the core of your pile where the heat is most concentrated. Around this time you might want to stop adding materials and let your compost pile completely break down. Now is a good time to start a new pile. It's time to sift your original pile when it is comprised mostly of compost.



A handmade compost sifter is easy to make right at home!

### Step 6: Applying Compost

Your compost should have a pH that is neutral and full of nutrients. Compost can be used as a soil amendment, as mulch, as a component to your seed starting mix, and when transplanting.

#### For More Information:

Visit the Master Composter & Recycler  
webpage:

<http://www.uri.edu/cels/ceoc/index.html>

Or contact Sejal Lanterman at 401-874-4453  
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