

How to Make a Compost Pile

There are as many ways to make compost as there are people who do it. The following guidelines will get you started.

Step 1 - Build or purchase a compost bin. A New Age Composter can be purchased from the Newburyport Recycling Coordinator. Check catalogs, nurseries or hardware stores. Enclosed composters keep pests out, hold heat and moisture in, and are neat in appearance. Bins can be wire, wood, pallets, concrete blocks, or garbage bins with drainage holes drilled in them. Rodent-resistant bins have a secure cover and floor with openings no wider than one-half inch.

Step 2 - Set up the bin in a convenient, shady area with good drainage. A pile that is about three feet square and three feet high will help maintain the heat generated by the composting organisms throughout the winter. A smaller pile may not retain heat, but will still compost.

Step 3 - Start with a coarse layer such as corn stalks to build in air passages. Add alternating layers of brown and green materials and mix them together. Sprinkle with soil every 12 inches. Bury food scraps in the center of the pile. If brown and green material are not on hand, start with browns, mixing in greens as they become available. Shorten composting time by shredding leaves, using a mulching blade or lawn mower. Set aside several bags of leaves for when brown material is scarce in spring and summer.

Step 4 - Add water if materials are dry as the pile builds. Dry material will not decompose.

Step 5 - Over time, provide oxygen by fluffing the pile with a hoe or compost turning tool every time you add material. A complete turning of the pile in spring and fall so that the top becomes the bottom should result in finished compost within a year. Frequent turning will shorten the composting time.

High Nitrogen Green Material

Grass clippings

Weeds

Food Waste: fruit, veggies, coffee grounds, tea bags, egg shells

Manure (cow, horse, rabbit, chicken)

Seaweed

Alfalfa hay/meal

Blood meal

High Carbon Brown Material

Autumn leaves

Straw

Paper/cardboard: paper towels, napkins, bags, plates, coffee filters, tissue, newspaper

Cornstalks

Wood chips

Saw dust

Pine needles