

# COMPOSTING

## TURNING WASTE INTO A RESOURCE

Composting is the process of piling up different kinds of plant waste to accelerate its natural breakdown. The broken down material, a dark brown or black substance called compost, is rich in nutrients that can push plants to thrive when added to

their surrounding soil. Composting also helps to reduce food waste, which accounts for about 25% of fresh water used in the U.S. and about 30% of the trash in landfills.

4'x4' Recommended



### Size

Maintain a compost pile of 4 ft. wide by 4 ft. high. This size, with a proper carbon/nitrogen (*brown/green*) ratio of organic material in your pile, will help create a strong habitat for organisms that break down organic materials into nutrient-rich compost for your planted beds.

### Moisture

Add water evenly between layers as you build your compost pile. Make sure it stays about as moist as a damp sponge. Only a few drops of water should drip out if you squeeze hard. Any wetter and you might develop stinky or "anaerobic" conditions in the pile.

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### Aeration

Turn or "aerate" your pile regularly to allow flow of much needed oxygen and to redistribute beneficial bacteria, fungi, and other organisms. Aerating also helps to maintain your pile's moisture and carbon/nitrogen ratios. In most cases, the more you turn your pile, the quicker you achieve finished compost!

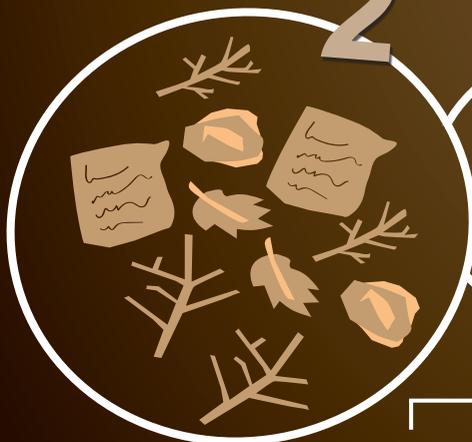
### Ratios

A good rule of thumb is layering 2 parts carbon to every 1 part nitrogen, by volume, in your compost pile. Carbons include mostly brown materials like wood chips, sawdust, paper, and dry leaves. Nitrogens are mostly green and include material like vegetable scraps, green grass clippings, and fresh leaves. Coffee grounds are also an excellent source of nitrogen, even though they are brown in color. Too much carbon could slow the breakdown into finished compost. Too much nitrogen could make the pile too hot to thrive for organisms who break down organic matter into compost.

### Temperature

A good carbon/nitrogen ratio will keep your compost pile at an optimal temperature between 135 and 165 degrees Fahrenheit. The heat is created by the respiration of organisms that work to break down, or "decompose," organic materials into nutrient-rich compost. But temperatures much higher than 165 degrees Fahrenheit could kill those decomposers, cooling and slowing compost production as decomposers die. A probe compost thermometer is a great way to accurately monitor the heat in your pile.

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**AVOID!**

- Meat, bones, fish, and dairy products
- Grease and oil
- Weed and grass seeds
- Plant material affected by disease or pests

