



# Composting

Nature's way of recycling



## Why compost?

### It saves money

- Reduces garbage
- Makes free soil enrichment
- Retains moisture for less watering

### It helps your garden

- Feeds the soil
- Prevents erosion
- Improves yields

### It improves the environment

- Turns waste into resources
- Saves landfill space
- Recycles nutrients back into the soil

## Compost or mulch?

Compost enriches the soil. Mulch covers the soil to retain moisture and suppress weeds. Compost can be used as a mulch.

## Bins or piles?

Compost can be made in open piles, but bins keep the piles neat and retain heat and moisture.

**ADEQ Helpline**  
(501) 682-0923

Composting is the decomposition of organic matter. Tiny organisms, worms and insects break down organic materials into compost. Compost contains nutrients which, when returned to the soil, are used by plants. This is nature's way of recycling.

## A balance of browns and greens

Place items from both of these groups in your compost pile:

**Browns** (carbon) are dry materials such as wood chips, dried leaves, straw, hay, pine needles, and shredded newspapers, cardboard and junk mail.

**Greens** (nitrogen) are fresh, moist materials such as fresh grass clippings, freshly pulled plants, fruit and vegetable scraps, crushed egg shells, coffee grounds and tea bags. The smaller you chop, the quicker your items will turn into compost.

**Caution!** Use too much brown, and composting slows down. Use too much green, and odors may develop. Don't use

dairy products, meats, fatty foods or pet manure.

## Here's how you start

1. **Collect** browns and greens. Items should be no larger than three inches.
2. **Place** 75% browns, 25% greens in a pile or bin of at least one cubic yard. Layer your browns and greens; cover food scraps with other materials.
3. **Water and stir weekly.** Make the pile damp as a wrung-out sponge. Cover with a lid or tarp to keep moisture in and to prevent over soaking by rain. If the pile is warm, it's working!
4. **Wait** about six months before using the compost. It's ready when it's dark and crumbly.

## Be a Master!

Master Gardeners are trained volunteers who aid the University of Arkansas Extension staff by helping people better understand gardening and our environment. More than 65 Arkansas counties have Master Gardener programs.

Information about the Master Gardener program and about composting is available at your county extension office.



[www.adeq.state.ar.us](http://www.adeq.state.ar.us)

See other side for resources and troubleshooting

## Composting websites

Univ. of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service	<a href="http://www.arhomeandgarden.org/composting.htm">www.arhomeandgarden.org/composting.htm</a>
Composting at Home/Cornell University	<a href="http://cwmi.css.cornell.edu/compostingathome.pdf">http://cwmi.css.cornell.edu/compostingathome.pdf</a>
Adventures of Vermi	<a href="http://www.ciwmb.ca.gov/Vermi/">www.ciwmb.ca.gov/Vermi/</a>
Composting 101	<a href="http://www.composting101.com">www.composting101.com</a>

## Fix my compost pile!

Here are some common problems and likely solutions:

Problem	Reason	Solution
<i>"Nothing's happening."</i>	Needs more air; needs more water; needs more depth; or it may need more greens. <i>Cooking slows down in winter.</i>	Stir more. Add holes to bin. Water weekly; pile should be damp. Pile should be at least one cubic yard. Add more greens. Wait for spring.
<i>"The compost smells...like rotten eggs"</i>	Too much water or needs more air.	Cover during excessive rain; stir it more to dry out and add browns. Turn the pile ( <i>see below</i> ). Ratio is 25% greens. Bury food waste in center of pile.
<i>"The compost smells...like ammonia."</i>	Not enough browns (carbon).	Add browns, cover the pile until smell decreases, then turn pile ( <i>see below</i> ).
<i>"Weeds are growing in my compost."</i>	Compost pile is at the wrong temperature.	Turn the pile weekly. Take everything out of the bin, rebuild and water.
<i>"I have fire ants in my compost."</i>	Compost pile is too dry or at wrong temperature; food too close to top.	Find the nest and drench insects with boiling water.
<i>"Can I jumpstart my compost with an additive?"</i>	The compost pile lacks greens.	Add one pound of complete fertilizer (10-20-10) per cubic yard of materials or use the perennial herb yarrow.
<i>"I don't want to buy an expensive compost bin."</i>	Find bin building designs at <a href="http://www.arhomeandgarden.org/composting/bin.htm">www.arhomeandgarden.org/composting/bin.htm</a>	