

# Home Composting

## Getting Started

Obtain a compost bin—any size or shape. We like a large bin that holds more heat. Put it some place convenient, where you walk by all the time, so it doesn't take effort to walk to and turn. Don't put it next to the house where water could run off the roof onto it. You will also need a compost turner or other tool to help you turn the pile.

## Good Ingredients

To make compost, the microbes need air, water, carbon material for an energy source, and protein (nitrogen) material to build their bodies from. Even though most materials contain carbon and nitrogen, high carbon materials are sawdust, dried leaves, bark, wood chips, dried grass, or any organic material that you can put on a pile and moisten and nothing happens. It doesn't smell, draw flies or seem to ever rot. High protein or nitrogen materials are manure, kitchen waste, green vegetable matter, animal matter such as blood meal, fishmeal, or any organic material that quickly rots, smells, and draws flies when wet.

## To Build a Pile

Start adding organic materials as they become available. Use all kitchen and yard organic waste. Grinding the larger leaves and twigs will make them compost faster. To inoculate—or get the organisms working—in the beginning you can add compost microbes, or a few shovels of compost or garden soil. It is always better to start the compost pile with the carbon materials and add the nitrogen materials a little at a time until the microbes are really working, creating heat without a smell or flies.

## Turning Your Pile

A loose, light pile needs aeration about once a month. A tight, heavier pile will require more aeration, but no more than every third day is necessary. The pile can be turned with a garden fork or shovel, but the easiest is with a compost turning probe. This is a tool about the size and shape of a walking cane with two wings that fold into a point when pushed into the pile but spread open when pulled up. Another easy way to turn the pile is to unpin the wire cage; take it from around the pile; put it back together next to it, then put the material back in. Each pile should be turned at least once like this to be sure the outside ends up in the middle so it can through the heating process.

## Using Your Compost

The compost is ready to use when the materials have turned brown and most of them have lost their identity. The material should have a earthy smell. Use your compost as a soil conditioner/fertilizer in the garden or as a mulch around shrubs and trees to retain moisture, control soil temperatures, and supply dozens of nutritional needs. If your soil is lacking in certain elements, the best way to add them is through the compost pile. Add rock phosphate for phosphorous, granite, sand or wood ashes for potash.

## Helpful Hints

Wet the pile, if needed, with a fish emulsion solution—6 to 12 tablespoons per gallon of water. This adds nitrogen but never too much at one time, plus, it contains all the nutrients for the microbes and later on your plants.

***Continued on Back***

# Home Composting

Unwanted insects, such as pill bugs and ants will get into the compost pile. Turning often and keeping the moisture just right so the pile heats up to 140 to 160 degrees will discourage them.

Making compost is as much as an art as it is a science. The best way to learn to make good compost is by doing it and not giving up. Most home compost failures are caused by simply keeping the pile too wet. In a rainy season you can cover the top with plastic but not for too long, because you might smother it and cause it to smell.

Your compost bin will take from 5 to 8 months to compost. If you have fun composting you can start several bins at different times.

---

*The source for this **GVST Gardening Guide** is Malcolm Beck, founder of Garden-Ville. The material is excerpted from his book: "The Garden-Ville Method: Lessons in Nature". It is available at most area nurseries and garden centers. Visit the Garden-Ville website at [www.garden-ville.com](http://www.garden-ville.com) You can find all of the GVST Gardening Guides on our website at [www.gardeningvolunteers.org](http://www.gardeningvolunteers.org).*

