

# Home Composting Tips

## What can be composted?

- Carbon: Fallen leaves, small branches and twigs, shredded newspaper and cardboard, paper plates, paper napkins, and paper towels
- Nitrogen: Fruit and vegetable scraps, tea bags, egg shells, coffee grounds, young herbaceous plants, grass clippings, and farm animal manure (if compost reaches 140°F for five days)

## What should not be composted?

- Weeds that have gone to seed and diseased plants
- Meat, bones, oils, fats, and dressings (may attract animals and cause foul odors)
- Animal waste of carnivores (can harbor diseases)

## The composting process

- Locate compost pile or unit in partially shaded area within reach of hose
- Layer ~equal amounts “green” materials and “brown” materials in 3-4-inch tiers
- Compost pile should be a minimum of 3’ by 3’ by 3’ for best results
- If using highly carbon-based materials (dry), watering the pile as you build may be beneficial
- Pile will heat up rapidly due to microbial activity and may produce steam
- In ~4-7 days it will begin to cool and should be turned to mix materials and allow pile to heat again
- Ready in ~6 weeks if turned and watered regularly
- When finished, compost will be dark brown and crumbly, and temperature will plateau
- Mix into 4-6 inches of soil surface
- Compost will provide and help retain nutrients, suppress weeds, condition soil, balance soil pH, and provide habitat for beneficial microbes

## Temperature

- Most effective range for composting: 122°F - 131°F
- Higher temperatures, 131°F - 140°F, can more readily destroy weed seeds and plant pathogens, but it’s harder to maintain in small, home composts
- Can monitor temperature of the pile using long-stemmed compost thermometer that reads 160°F
- Materials added to compost pile but not turned or watered will still decompose, but takes much longer (static composting)

## Compost Troubleshooting

<u>Problem</u>	<u>Cause</u>	<u>Action</u>
Odor	Excess nitrogen	Mix in “brown” material (carbon)
	Excess moisture	Open pile, add carbon material, and turn
	Lack of oxygen	Turn pile
Pile too cool (below 110°F)	Lack of nitrogen	Mix in “green” materials
	Lack of oxygen	Turn pile
	Lack of moisture	Dampen pile
	Excess moisture	Open pile, add carbon material and turn
Animal or insect pests	Food in pile (meat, fat, eggs)	Keep animal products out of pile

*Adapted from UF/IFAS table, “Compost Tips for the Home Gardener” by Sydney Park Brown*

### Additional Composting Resources:

- UF/IFAS EDIS Publication: *Compost Tips for the Home Gardener*  
(<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ep323>)
- UF/IFAS Extension Sarasota County Website: *Compost*  
(<http://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/sarasota/natural-resources/waste-reduction/composting/>)



Molly Jameson, Sustainable Agriculture and Community Food Systems Agent  
 UF/IFAS Leon County Extension, 615 Paul Russell Road, Tallahassee, FL 32301  
 mjameson@ufl.edu

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