



Greens and Browns Make Healthy Compost!

Books for more compost information

- Worms Eat My Garbage* by Mary Appelhof.
Everyone's Guide to Home Composting by Robyn Bern.
Improving Garden Soil with Green Manures by Richard Alther and Richard O. Raymond.
Squirmy Wormy Composters by Bobbie Kalman and Janine Schaub.
Easy Composting by Jeff Ball and Robert Kowrik.
Let It Rot: The Gardener's Guide to Composting by Stu Campbell.
The Mulch Book by Stu Campbell.
Compost This Book! by Tom Christopher and Marty Asher.
The Bio-Gardener's Bible. How to Build a Super-Fertile Garden by Lee Fryer.
Backyard Composting: Your Complete Guide to Recycling Yard Waste by Harmonious Technologies.
Let an Earthworm Be Your Garbage Man, a report by Home, Farm and Garden Research, Inc.
An Agricultural Testament by Sir Albert Howard.
Composting by Dick Kitto.
The Gardener's Guide to Better Soil by Gene Logsdon.
The Rodale Book of Composting: Easy Methods for Every Gardener by Deborah L. Martin and Grace Gershuny.
The Rodale Guide to Composting by Jerry Minnich and Marjorie Hunt and the editors of *Organic Gardening* magazine.
How to Grow Vegetables and Fruits by the Organic Method by J.I. Rodale.
Van Patten's Organic Gardener's Composting by Steve Solomon.
Easy Composting by Vic Sussman.

Grass clippings, leaves and other yard wastes make up more than 20 percent of Denver's household trash, despite the fact that these materials are completely recyclable. Composting yard wastes and some food wastes can help us reduce what we send to the landfill by more than 300 pounds per person per year and allow us to recycle these materials into a soil amendment that will enrich our lawns, gardens and house plants.

Denver Recycles, a program of Denver Public Works/Solid Waste Management, and Denver Urban Gardens encourages you to try home composting both to help protect our environment and to improve the health of your lawn and garden.

This flyer was designed by Leslie Baca, a graduate of the Denver Master Composter Training and Outreach Program. If you wish to learn more about this program, or about composting in general, call Denver Recycles at **3-1-1** (outside Denver 720-913-1311) or Denver Urban Gardens at **303-292-9900**. You can also visit us online for links to other great resources at

www.DenverGov.org/DenverRecycles
www.dug.org

Browns



paper, shredded
eggshells • sunflower stalks
end-of season annual plants • straw
saw dust (small amounts) • cotton string • oats
cabbage and broccoli stalks • grain hulls • tissue
cardboard cores (toilet paper & paper towels) • wool
autumn leaves • dryer lint • lawn thatch • turnips
peanut husks • stalks from perennial plants
chipped branches • vacuum cleaner sweepings
coffee filters • corn cobs • cornstalks
cotton • landscape trimming
paper towels



Characteristics that make a healthy compost pile

* Size

You want to collect enough materials so that the pile is a minimum of 3' x 3' x 3' or a maximum of 5' x 5' x 5'. Anything smaller won't get hot enough and anything larger will be very difficult to turn. You can build an open pile or a pile inside a bin. Pre-assembled plastic bins are available or you can design your own – wire mesh with a black plastic tarp works well.

* Surface Area

Take your greens and browns and chop them into 1" to 2" pieces. This provides a lot of surface area within your pile and allows air to circulate through it. It will also speed up the time it takes for compost to finish.

* Composition

Begin by collecting a variety of materials that are high in nitrogen and carbon. These are known as “greens” and “browns”. Alternate equal sized layers of 3” to 6” starting with the browns. This will approximate the ideal proportions for vegetable gardening compost – 25 to 30 parts carbon to 1 part of nitrogen by weight or 1 part carbon to 1 part nitrogen by volume. Mix the “green” and the “brown” layers as you build them. Avoid meats, fats, dairy products, bones, dog/cat feces, crab grass, quack grass, weeds with mature seeds, diseased plants and plants that have been treated with chemicals. See the list of suitable materials in this flyer.

* Water

Add just enough water to each layer of your pile as you build it so that it's as wet as a wrung-out sponge. A pile that is too wet will smell bad and one that's too dry will take longer to decompose.

* Air

Increase the airflow from the bottom of your pile by turning the soil where the pile is to be placed and/or by building it over branches, wire mesh or a wooden pallet. Add more air by turning it when the internal temperature reaches 131° to 140° F – you may be able to see steam rising from it. In warm weather, turn the pile at least once a week with a garden fork or an aeration tool. Finished compost will no longer heat above 110° and it will have shrunk to half of its original size. It can take as little as a month in the right conditions or it can take as long as 24 months if different conditions and techniques are used.



Greens



alfalfa pellets
apples and peels • artichokes
asparagus stalks • bananas and peels
beans • beet tops • berries • broccoli • carrots and tops • celery
citrus fruit and rinds • coffee grounds • pears • pet hair
food scraps (non meat scraps only) • cucumbers • peas
garden waste (overgrown vegetables) • grass clippings (no pesticides)
moldy food (no meat, fat, cheese or bones) • onions and skins
grapefruit • green leaves • spent hops • human hair • grapes
lettuce • manure (herbivores only) • melons • pineapples
pond algae • potatoes and peels • pumpkins • squash
recycled water from cleaning fish tanks
weeds without mature seeds



A healthy compost pile has
five basic characteristics:

Size

Surface Area

Composition

Water

Air