

### rapid compost technique

- Build a 3'x3'x3' pile with equal amounts of browns and greens.
- Chop materials to increase surface area for microorganisms to decompose the browns and greens.
- Turn the pile every 3 days at first, then weekly. Add water as needed to keep as moist as a wrung-out sponge.
- Start saving ingredients for the next pile.
- Finished compost looks like rich, brown soil. The original ingredients cannot be identified.
- Compost should be finished in 6 to 8 weeks.
- Screen compost through a ½-1" screen over a wheelbarrow; throw larger pieces back into the pile for additional composting.

### slow compost technique

- Add chopped and unchopped yard materials as they are generated. Keep materials as moist as a wrung-out sponge.
- Turn as desired.
- Harvest composted matter from the bottom of the pile in 12 to 18 months.

### mixed compost technique

- Mix fruit, vegetable, and yard trimmings. Be sure to add both browns and greens. If necessary add water until slightly damp.
- Feed yard trimmings to your pile as you generate them. First chop them into pieces 6" or smaller.
- Bury food scraps 6-12" deep in the heart of the pile. Never dump and run. Feed pile as often as you like.
- Turn compost with a pitch fork or mix it about once a week. Keep it as moist as a wrung-out sponge.
- Harvest rich, brown, finished compost after 3 to 8 months. Sift out coarse, unfinished materials and return them to the pile.

Always wear gloves when handling compost.

### Troubleshooting

SYMPTOMS	PROBLEMS	SOLUTIONS
• Pile not composting	• Too dry/too wet • Too much brown	• Add water only until slightly damp; turn if too wet. • Add fresh matter or organic nitrogen fertilizer; turn.
• Pile smells rotten	• Too wet/too many food scraps or lawn clippings	• Turn and add browns.
• Attracts flies	• Food scraps exposed • Non-compostables	• Bury and mix food scraps 6-12" into heart of pile. • Remove meat, dairy, grease, etc. and turn pile.
• Rodents in pile	• Food scraps exposed • Bin holes larger than ½"	• Use traps or baits; rodent-proof bin; remove meat, grease, etc.; bury food; turn pile.

#### Sources:

- UCCE Placer/Nevada County
- UCCE Sacramento County
- Regional Recycling Pamphlet



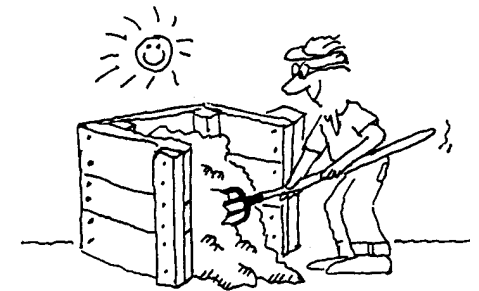
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# Master Gardeners

## Backyard Composting



LEARN HOW TO RECYCLE FRUIT,  
VEGETABLES, AND YARD TRIMMINGS  
INTO A BLACK GOLD SOIL  
AMENDMENT FOR YOUR GARDEN

by  
UC Cooperative Extension  
Sacramento County  
Master Gardeners



## Why Compost?

- Composting is nature's way to turn fruit, vegetable, and yard trimmings into a dark, crumbly, sweet-smelling soil conditioner.
- Composting benefits the environment by recycling organic resources and extending the life of landfills.
- Composting may save money by lowering garbage bills and replacing store bought soil conditioners.
- Compost improves the water-holding capacity of soil, decreasing water needs.
- Compost helps to keep clay soil from compacting. Soil is easier to work and root systems will develop better.
- Compost gives sandy soil needed structure.



## Choose a system

Bins, drums, and open piles:

- Can be manufactured, purchased, or easily made at home using concrete blocks, garbage cans, scrap wood, and wood pallets.
- The optimal bin size is 3'x3'x3' (a cubic yard) to 5'x5'x5'.
- Bins require air holes.

### Begin Composting...

It's as easy as 1 - 2 - 3

- 1. Chop** materials. They will break down faster.
- 2. Mix** "BROWNS" (dry, woody materials) with "GREENS" (moist, green materials).
- 3. Maintain** air and water balance by keeping compost as moist as a wrung-out sponge.

### Compost happens...

as microorganisms (bacteria, fungi) and macroorganisms (worms, insects, and their relatives) break down the contents of a compost pile. Supplying them with their basic needs of food, water, and air will speed up the compost process.

## Follow the basics

### Do compost

Browns (CARBON)	Greens (NITROGEN)
• Dry leaves	• Grass clippings
• Eggshells	• Herbivore manures
• Straw	• Flowers
• Coffee filters	• Sawdust
• Hair, lint	• Coffee grounds
• Wood shavings	• Green leaves
• Pine needles	• Young weeds
• Shredded newspaper	• Tea leaves/bags
• Chopped woody prunings	• Sod

### Don't compost

- Meat, bones, or fish
- Dairy products or grease
- Dog, cat, or bird feces
- Sawdust from plywood or treated wood
- Invasive weeds or plants (Bermuda grass, ivy, oxalis)
- Diseased plants