

[COMPOSTING BASICS]

BIOLOGY: Many organisms which enhance decomposition live in compost piles. Numerous bacteria start the process and are soon joined by fungi, protozoans, centipedes, millipedes, beetles and earthworms. Organisms assisting in the decomposition process require both carbon and nitrogen.

MATERIALS: Compostable landscape debris contain carbon and nitrogen. The amount of carbon and nitrogen is called the "C:N Ratio." A mix of materials composed of 30 to 50 parts carbon to one part nitrogen works best. Below is the C:N Ratio for various materials:

Sawdust	500:1
Paper	170:1
Leaves	40:1 to 80:1
Rotted Manure	20:1
Non-woody Weeds	20:1
Grass Clippings	19:1
Kitchen Wastes	15:1

SURFACE AREA: The more surface area the decomposing organisms have to work on, the faster waste becomes compost. Chopping waste with a shovel, sickle, shredding machine or lawn mower will speed the composting process.

VOLUME: Heat is generated by the decomposing organisms as they work. Piles smaller than three feet cubed (27 cu. ft.) will have trouble holding this heat, while piles larger than five feet cubed (125 cu. ft.) don't allow enough air to reach the organisms at the center. These proportions are of importance only if your goal is to make compost quickly.

MOISTURE & AERATION: The decomposing organisms function best when the compost materials are about as moist as a wrung-out sponge and have many air passages. Extremes of sun or rain can adversely affect this moisture balance.

For more information on composting, lawn care, and Florida-Friendly landscaping, please contact:

Sumter County Extension
7620 State Road 471, Suite 2
Bushnell, FL 33513-8734
PH: (352) 793-2728



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HOME COMPOSTING



Sumter County Extension
University of Florida IFAS Extension

SUMTER COUNTY'S LANDSCAPE DEBRIS CAN BE RECYCLED!

What is compost?

Compost is a dark, crumbly and earthy-smelling form of decomposing organic matter that can be used to enhance sandy soils found in Florida.

Why should I compost?

Composting is a practical and convenient way to handle yard trimmings. It is easier and cheaper than bagging landscape debris and it improves your soil and plants. If you have a garden, lawn, trees, shrubs or planter boxes, you have a use for compost.

By using compost, you return organic matter to the soil in a usable form. Soil with compost added holds more nutrients and water, improves soil structure and drainage and enhances plant growth.

What can I compost?

Yard trimmings, such as fallen leaves, grass clippings, and the remains of garden plants, makes excellent compost. Woody landscape debris can be clipped and sawed down to a size useful for wood stoves or fireplaces or run through a shredder for making mulch.

Kitchen wastes, such as salad greens, vegetable and fruit peelings and coffee grinds, may be added by burying them several inches deep in your compost pile.

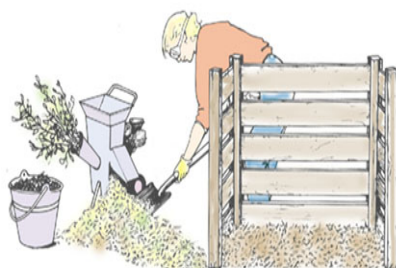
Avoid adding weeds, diseased plants, meat scraps, bones, dressings, oils and fatty foods.

COMPOSTING METHODS

Holding Bin and Static Piles

Holding bins or static piles of yard trimmings are the easiest and require the least amount of work.

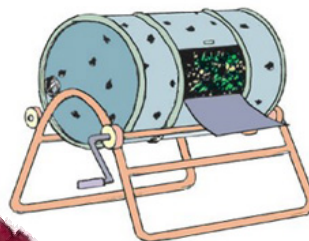
How? Place the holding bin where it is most convenient. Drop various yard wastes into the bin as they are collected. Chopping or shredding yard trimmings, alternating high carbon and high nitrogen materials and providing sufficient moisture



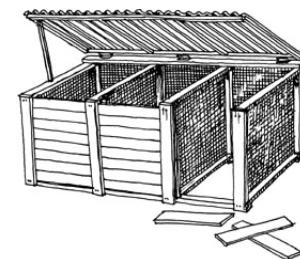
and aeration will speed the process (see "Composting Basics" section). Landscape debris may also be piled in non-windy, unobtrusive areas.

How long does it take?

Using this method, compost can take from six months to two years, so you need to be patient. However, this is the simplest method of composting.



Another style of compost unit uses a series of three or more bins that allows waste to be turned on a regular schedule. This type of unit is most appropriate for gardeners with a large volume of yard waste and the desire to make a high quality compost.



How?

- Alternate the layering of high-carbon and high-nitrogen materials to approximately a 30:1 ratio.
- Keep materials as moist as a wrung-out sponge.
- Check the pile temperature regularly. When the heat decreases substantially, turn the pile into the next bin.
- Dampen the materials if they are not moist and add more high-nitrogen material if heating is not occurring.
- Then make a new pile in the original bin. Repeat the process each time the pile in the first bin cools.
- After two weeks in the third bin, the compost should be ready for garden use.

Turn Style Bins

This method of composting uses a barrel style unit which tumbles the waste for aeration. There is a wide variety of turn style compost bins on the market.