

A Crash Course in Composting

A basic compost pile needs carbons (browns), nitrogen (greens), water, and oxygen. Carbon is dry material such as wood chips, dried leaves, dried grass, and shredded paper. Nitrogen is fresh moist material such as fresh grass cuttings and kitchen food scraps. The smaller the pieces are when they are added to your compost pile, the quicker they will decompose.

Recipe for the Perfect Pile (*compost cake*):

- 3x3, 4x4, or 5x5 in size
- Base (plate) - sticks or pallet, lets the air in the bottom of the pile
- Carbon (cake part) - 7" - leaves, wood chips, shredded paper
- Nitrogen (icing) - 1" - grass, food wastes
- Shovel full of soil or compost (sprinkles) - adds microbes to help "jump start" compost
- Water (chocolate glaze) - wet, but if squeezed, no water comes out.

The following may help speed up decomposition and create compost faster:

- Do not stir for first 10 days
 - Ensure not too little/much water
 - Location - shade, but be cautious of trees or roots that may "steal" nutrients
- Stir once a week and add more water if necessary. Stirring ensures that all areas of the pile receive necessary oxygen, distributes heat, and also prevents bad odors. A pile that is decomposing properly should generate temperatures of 140°-160°F at its center. This heat will kill most weeds, plant diseases and insect eggs. Large piles generate more heat than a small pile. When the compost is finished, the pile will no longer produce heat.