

Very little yard trash needs to be taken away from the landscape where it is produced. Leaves, grass clippings, trimmings and discarded plants can all be used in a variety of ways to improve the landscape.

Leaves and Pine Needles:

Leaves and pine needles can be used as mulch under trees and shrubs. If there is no grass growing under the trees, they don't even need to be raked. They can be left in place where they fall as a natural ground cover. Leaves and pine needles will decompose faster if shredded with a lawn mower. Leaves and pine needles can also be added to your compost bin. If you have too many to use in your own yard, share with a neighbor, friend or nearby school. If there is an obvious leaf disease problem, it is a good idea to remove the leaves and use for compost and not as a mulch.



Grass Clippings: The easiest way to recycle grass clippings is to leave them in place on the lawn. If you are mowing and fertilizing properly, this practice will not cause a problem for your grass. Remember that grass needs to be mowed frequently during warm summer months. Only one-third of the length of the grass blade should be removed with each mowing. Leaving grass clippings on the lawn does not contribute to thatch. Over-fertilizing is the major cause of thatch in lawn grasses. Mulching blades are not



necessary, but if you use them, the grass clippings will decompose more quickly.

Grass clippings can also be raked or bagged and used as mulch around plants. Do not apply the clippings too thickly or they will begin to smell. Grass clippings are also an excellent addition to your compost pile and are great at getting your pile to heat up.

Prunings: Small pieces of pruned shrubs and trees can be broken or cut into small pieces and used as mulch around shrubs or around trees. Because these pieces are not as attractive as other types of mulch, you may want to use them behind the shrubs, out of sight or put a layer of traditional mulch on top.



If you have a shredder or chipper, small branches can be shredded and used as mulch in beds and walkways. Shredded twigs and branches can be added to your compost.

Remains of garden plants and weeds:

These discards are good for your compost bin. However, if you are going to add weeds to your bin, be sure that your compost pile gets enough sunlight to heat up properly. This will kill any weed seeds so they will not germinate and cause problems later. If seeds do germinate in the pile, chop them up and turn them back into the compost.

Leaves, pine needles, grass clippings and pruned branches provide nutrients and organic matter to the soil. They help prevent erosion, help control weeds, and prevent soil from splashing on walkways and the sides of buildings. Never dump grass clippings or other yard wastes into the storm drains or waterways. This can cause pollution.

Compost: Compost is a great way to improve your soil without commercial fertilizers. Compost can be made from yard waste and food scraps (no animal products should be used). Compost can improve soil texture, promote root development in plants and create a good environment for microorganisms and earthworms.

Composting doesn't have to be complicated. The simplest form of composting can be just placing leaves and grass clippings behind some shrubs in a hidden corner of your yard. No container is needed. Turning the pile at intervals will help

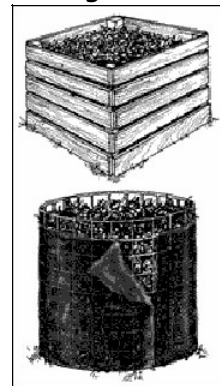
speed up the process.

Homemade or manufactured compost bins allow you to add kitchen wastes such as vegetable and fruit scraps, egg shells and coffee grounds. Compost piles need adequate moisture, oxygen, and nitrogen (carbon) sources to generate the right conditions for decomposition.

Here are some steps for setting up a compost bin:

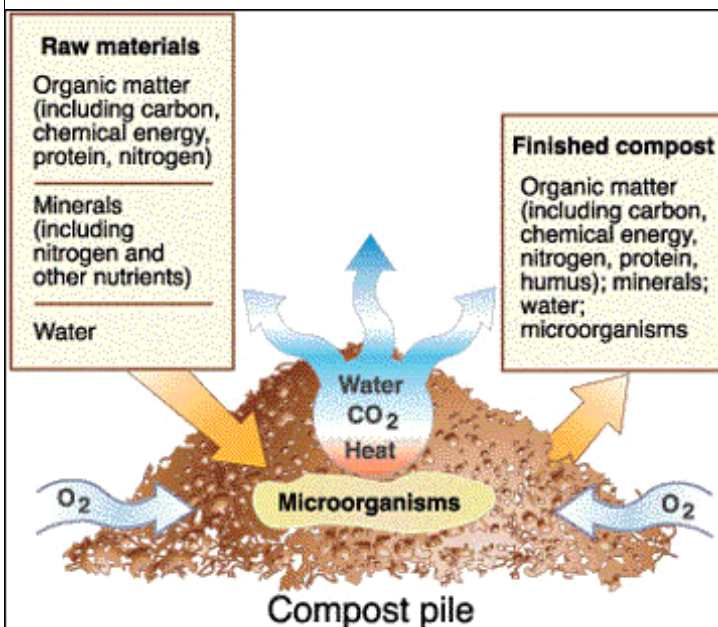
1. **Decide on a container.** There are several commercially available at local garden stores. If you prefer, you can make your own container using wire

fencing. For one type of container, simply form the fencing into a ring shape and secure the shape with wire. Another type of compost container uses two by four lumber to make a frame

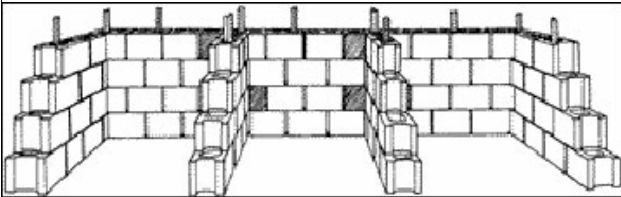


and the wire fencing can be attached with staples or nails. If you have room in your yard, you might want to design your compost bin to include 2 or more chambers. With this type of set-up you can "turn" your compost from one bin section into the next section.

- Another type of compost container uses a plastic garbage can. Drill several holes, one-half inch in diameter, into the sides and bottom of the can to allow air to circulate. Turn the garbage can



- on its side and roll it to turn the pile.
 - A compost bin can also be constructed of concrete blocks stacked with the open sides facing outward. This type of bin would have the blocks on 3 sides and the front left open for easy access.
2. **Determine the compost size.** A compost bin can be any size but consider 3 feet by 3 feet by 3 feet (high), or one cubic yard, to be a minimum. Determine the location of the compost.

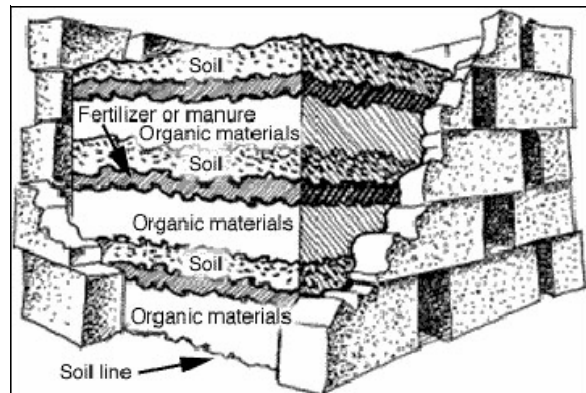


Remember that the pile needs to be in a convenient location for easy access and close to a water source. It should be set up on level, well-drained ground. If possible, locate the compost away from pine trees to avoid an over-abundance of needles in the compost. Locating the compost by a windbreak, such as a wall or tree, can help prevent over-drying due to breezes. Avoid placing the pile next to a wooden fence or other structure since the compost will cause some wood to rot.

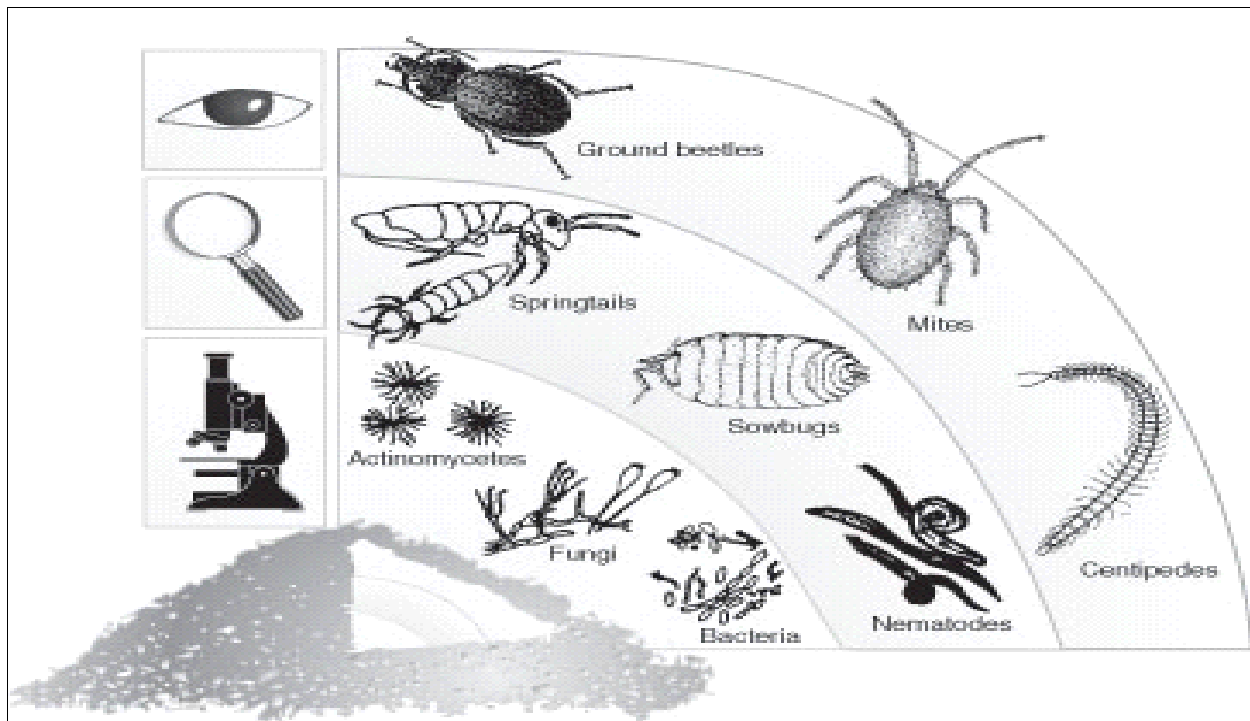
3. **Build the pile.** Form a base of coarse twigs or wood chips to help with air circulation. Then build the pile in layers beginning with 4-6 inches of brown plant material. The next layer should be green garden material (grass trimmings, plant trimmings, kitchen scraps). Over the layer of plant material, add a nitrogen source (manure or high nitrogen fertilizer) to help speed up the composting process. For example, use a

layer of animal manure 1 to 2" deep or 1 cup of a 12-12-12 fertilizer per 25 square feet of top surface. The third is a 1" thick layer of soil. Add enough water to the pile to keep it moist but not too wet (about the wetness of a wrung out sponge). Add water as you are layering to make sure to get moisture to the entire pile. Do not add lime as the pile will rise in pH over time naturally.

4. **Maintain the pile.** The pile should be turned periodically, and especially whenever new material is added. A pitchfork or shovel will do the job. Some commercial compost bins contain a rotating device that allows the turning to be done by rotating a drum. The temperature in the pile should be high for maximum results (100-140 degrees).



Composting can take from 6 weeks to a year, depending on the size of the organic materials used and the temperature of the pile. Finished compost is dark brown and crumbly, with a soil-like texture. It should have a sweet, musty smell.



Do not compost the following materials:

- meat or fish scraps or bones
- dairy products
- peanut butter
- cooking oil or animal fats
- diseased plants
- household pet wastes
- plywood scraps or pressure-treated lumber
- anything that does not biodegrade (plastics, synthetic fibers)

These products can attract pests, cause foul odors, or contaminate the compost. To avoid attracting flies, bury food scraps under a foot of existing compost in the pile, or cover food scraps with a layer of straw, leaves or sawdust.

Troubleshoot Compost Problems:

1. Compost produces bad odor. The pile is either too wet or too compacted. Turn the pile to increase air supply. If it is too wet, add dry materials to soak up excess moisture.
2. The pile is not breaking down. This usually means the pile is too dry. Add water and turn the pile.
3. The pile is not heating up enough. The pile may be too small. Add more materials to make the pile larger. If the pile is the required minimum size of 3' x 3' x 3', add extra nitrogen or fresh grass clippings.

Acknowledgments

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Making and Using Composts; Christopher Starbuck, University of Missouri-Columbia Extension, G 6956, revised 2001.

Web site for the University of Florida, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences: <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>