



BACKYARD COMPOSTING



INSTRUCTIONS & GUIDELINES

Compost is the resulting product of the natural decomposition process of organic matter. Composting is an excellent way to recycle organic matter or dead plant material. What begins as household organic materials become compost—a soil enrichment. If you would like to compost on your own at home, the City offers composters (constructed from old garbage cans) for \$5 each. You can pick these up at one of the two Phoenix transfer stations. Call ahead at 602-262-6251 for more information.

FOLLOW THESE STEPS

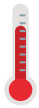
- 1 Begin by finding a good spot for your composter. This area should be in a spot in which you will plant later, since some of the nutrients from the compost will drain into the soil below. Sun or shade exposure is not critical, although a pile heats up and dries out much faster in a sunny location, and therefore, will need to have moisture added more frequently.
- 2 Place a layer of dried material at the bottom of the composter for a depth of about six inches.
- 3 Place a layer of mulch and other brown materials to a depth of about two inches. Continue to layer these materials until the composter is almost filled or until your materials are used up, finishing up with brown materials. Remember, the smaller in size the material, the quicker the decomposition. Consider crushing larger pieces. As you have available materials, throw them into the pile so that you're continually adding materials to your composter.
- 4 The holes on the side of the bins should allow air to pass through, but you will also need to occasionally turn the mixture to incorporate air into the pile.

MIXTURE CONTENT IN THE PILE

The carbon/nitrogen ratio will determine how long decomposition of organic matter will take. Brown materials, which provide carbon, consist of dead leaves, twigs, sawdust, straw, shredded newspaper, and other dry organic materials. Green materials, which provide nitrogen, consist of moist organic matter such as green grass clippings, discarded kitchen scraps, and weeds (without seeds). Actually, any mixture of green and brown materials (plus water and occasional turning for oxygen) can create compost. After working with the materials available to you, you will likely come up with a mixture that works well for you.



MAINTAINING THE COMPOST PILE



Temperature - Material will begin to decompose, and will reach a maximum decomposition rate when the material's temperature is between 110 and 160 degrees Fahrenheit. The hotter the pile, the faster the decomposition.



Aeration - The material must be mixed occasionally to incorporate air into the decomposition process. Otherwise, as the air is used up, the microbial action that turns the material into compost slows down dramatically, which can create odors.



Controlling odors - Odors occur when not enough air (oxygen) is present in the materials. This can be prevented or corrected by incorporating more brown material and thoroughly mixing or turning the batch which allows more air into the material. Also, keep a fresh layer of dried brown material on top. This will act like an air filter.



Moisture - The best environment for good decomposition is a damp environment. The microbes responsible for breaking down the plant matter and turning it into compost prefer a "moist, wrung-out sponge" type of environment—damp, but not wet. Therefore, especially during the summer months, it will be necessary to add small amounts of water to the mixture to keep it damp. Also, add water as you add materials to your container.

USE THESE MATERIALS

When composting only use materials that will break down easily like:

Discarded fruit and vegetables

Grain scraps - bread, pasta, rice

Crushed eggshells

Coffee grounds (with filter)

Tea bags

Fruit juices

Yard waste - grass clippings, leaves, bush trimmings (stems should be less than 1/4" thick), "barnyard" manure, sawdust, wood chips, straw, cactus clippings, waste from vegetable and fruit gardens

AVOID THESE MATERIALS

Animal waste - pet feces, lard, butter, grease, meat, fish waste, cheese, milk, oil food or cooking grease

Trash - glass, plastic

Diseased plants

Acidic plants - avoid plants that are toxic to other plants like eucalyptus, oleander, juniper, acacia, pine needles and cypress

Weeds - seeds and invasive plants like Bermuda grass take longer to decompose. Place these in a black garbage bag and allow them to sit in the sun for several weeks as the contents of the bag must reach temperatures of 120 degrees Fahrenheit or higher for a period of about a week before being added to the compost

USING YOUR COMPOST

It will take about two months to generate your first batch of compost, depending upon how much work goes into it. It may then be used in vegetable and flower gardens, on lawns, or around trees and shrubs. If desired, you may want to sift the compost before adding to your soil or remove large undecomposed materials and throw them back into the bin. You may also add other soil amendments, such as gypsum, sulfur or fertilizer.