



One-Page Guide To Hot Composting For Project Grow Community Gardens

Our Motto: *Composting is essential to community gardening.*

Step One – Be Familiar With Basic Compost Science

Compost is the product of nature recycling dead organic materials like garden waste. Dead materials are consumed and digested by a host of decomposer creatures such as micro-organisms (bacteria and fungi) and macro-organisms (worms and insects). Composting is the managed process of speeding up the way nature recycle, by *creating the ideal conditions for the rapid decomposition of organic materials*. The ideal conditions for composting include (1) the right mix of organic waste, (2) the particle size of the materials, (3) the amount of moisture, and (4) periodic turning for aeration. A balanced, well-mixed pile will undergo temperature swings from low to high heat between periodic turning, until it stabilizes and becomes humus, the finished compost.

Step Two – Observe How To Use The Compost Site Areas or Bins

Every community garden should have a designated composting site - a place where garden waste is managed for composting; it should have the following areas of containment or bins.

1. **Incoming Browns** –this area or bin is for carbon-rich plant materials already dead, including fall leaves, straw, shredded paper, mulch, wood chips, woody branches. Shred to 1" size.
2. **Incoming Greens** – this area or bin is for the soft, fresh or live, moist, nitrogen-rich plant materials including veggies/fruit scraps, coffee grounds/tea bags, fresh leaves, garden prunings and grass clippings. Bruise, shred or chop everything to little pieces. Mash rhizomatous roots.
3. **Working Piles** – these areas/bins are for the working compost piles. Make the piles in batches instead of a continuous process, that is, once a pile is started, allow it to decompose fully without having to adjust to a new incoming material. In a 3-bin working pile system, start a pile on each bin if materials are plentiful. Pile up to the height of the bin. Follow the suggested layering of 2 parts browns, 1 part greens, and water on every layer. Turn the pile every 1 to 2 weeks. As a pile is turned and collapses in volume, merge the contents to the rightmost bin to free up bins. Start a new pile on an empty bin.
4. **Finished Compost** – this bin is for the finished compost that has been sifted. Harvest the compost right before turning pile. Initial pile will become compost after about 3 months.

Step Three – Follow The Compost Pile Recipe

The compost pile has this 5-step recipe: 1) *classify the organic ingredients into Greens and Browns*, 2) *shred, bruise, mash or chop them to small pieces 1" size*, 3) *stack them in layers of 2 parts Browns followed by a layer of 1 part Greens, a sprinkle of native soil, repeat this sequence up to the height of the bin, and moisten each layer*, (4) *monitor/log the daily temperature of the core of the pile between turning cycle*, and (5) *turn and moisten thoroughly* the pile every 1 to 2 weeks.

Step Four –Aerate & Check Moisture

Aerate the pile by turning the pile once every 1 to 2 weeks. Take a long-handled rake, a pitchfork, a compost crank, or even a long stick and push it down into different parts of the pile to mix and fluff up the pile. Move the inside of the pile outward and outer materials to the inside. While turning pile, spray water to evenly coat and soak the material. Check the compost once a week for these symptoms: rotten-egg odor, ammonia odor, slow decomposition, unwanted pests/fly, etc. For symptoms, check the source, *The Composting Guide of Project Grow...*

Step Five –Harvest the Finished Compost and Use It

Finished compost may be ready in 3 months. A finished compost will look like dark, crumbly topsoil, should bear no likeness to the original materials, and should have a pleasant, earthy smell. If you see finished compost at the bottom of the Working bins, move it to the Finished bin right *before* the actual turning of the pile to avoid contamination with unwanted seeds and diseases. Mix compost into flower and vegetable beds; blend it with potting soil to revitalize indoor plants; spread it on the lawn as fertilizer; or make compost tea for the plants.

Source of this page: *The Composting Guide of Project Grow Community Gardens.*