

COMPOSTING Q&A

Where is the best location for my compost bin?

Put your bin in a place that's convenient to get to, but also away from public view. You'll also want easy access to water. Your bin or compost pile should be between 3'x3' and 5'x5' in size, but you'll also need room around the pile to water, mix in additions, turn the compost regularly and maneuver a wheelbarrow or large buckets. Make sure you aren't too close to a fence or structure either.

Is a sunny spot or a shady spot best?

Avoid all-day shade if you can. Sunshine helps to keep the pile warm and active, but our intense summer sun can overheat and dry out your compost pile. Morning sun and light shade in the afternoon is ideal, but even without an ideal site, you can still compost successfully by keeping an eye on your compost and giving it attention when it's needed.

Green and brown- how much of each?

A good compost pile needs the right mix of nitrogen-rich green material and carbon-rich brown material. Since all brown materials have at least some nitrogen, and all green materials have at least some carbon, a mix of one part green to two parts brown is about right.

How often should I water my compost?

There isn't a set schedule for watering compost. It depends on the time of year, the weather, the amount of sun and shade and how often the compost gets turned. It shouldn't be too wet, and it shouldn't be too dry. You want your compost to feel like a wrung-out sponge- just right.

Turn, turn, turn? Why?

The microorganisms that turn dead plant materials into compost need oxygen. Turning the pile brings oxygen down into the pile. It can also help to dry out compost that's too moist.

When is it done and ready to use?

There are a few signs to watch for. The pile will be smaller, up to half its original size. The compost will cool down, be dark and crumbly and have an earthy smell. You won't be able to identify the original materials that you put into the pile.

What can I do with it?

You can mix an inch or two into of compost into your garden soil every year or spread an inch over the surface and let earthworms do the work for you. Compost can be mixed into the potting soil you use in your container gardens. It also makes a great mulch in flowerbeds; an inch of compost helps suppress weeds and doesn't need to be removed at the end of the season the way fabric or plastic weed barriers do.