



## Setting up a Compost Bin

Carbon and nitrogen are the keys to composting. Carbon is all of your brown materials, such as paper, newspaper, cardboard or leaves. Nitrogen is all of your green materials, such as grass clippings, vegetable scraps and freshly cut plant matter. Your compost pile will be most productive when you have more carbon than nitrogen in your pile, but this is easy to accomplish!

You can use pretty much any bin for composting – think plastic trash bin, old storage tote or wooden box. Be sure to drill plenty (if you think you have enough, drill 5 more on each side) of holes in the bottom and sides of your bin to let air circulate through. There are three reasons why it is best to use a dark bin that is rectangular shaped: 1. Worms and bugs prefer a dark area they can burrow into 2. Dark colors hold in heat, and you want your bin to reach 120<sup>0</sup> to 150<sup>0</sup> degrees F. 3. Heat kills seeds, so your compost won't spread weeds that you don't want growing in your garden.

If you think of your bin as layers you should have no trouble at all. Start with a layer of brown (carbon) material (shredded newspaper or cardboard is a great starting layer) mixed with soil (leftover soil from a potted plant is a good start). Then begin adding your green (nitrogen) material. The smaller the pieces, the faster it will break down. There are some people who blend their vegetable scraps before putting them into the compost. This is great, but not necessary. An extra chop to the end of a lettuce head or cutting an apple into smaller chunks is perfectly fine. Always try to keep more brown (carbon) material in your bin than green (nitrogen) material. One way to make sure you always have enough brown (carbon) material is to use your junk mail. Shred your junk mail (best to keep plastic out, as it takes too long to break down) in a paper shredder or rip it into strips (a great project for kids) and then toss it into your pile. Keeping your green (nitrogen) materials covered with brown (carbon) materials will keep your compost from smelling bad. Keeping your bin wet will keep things breaking down; spray it with the hose once a week. Did you boil potatoes or pasta or steam vegetables for dinner? Don't throw that water away; add it to your compost!

Depending on how often you turn your pile (more turning means more heat and less waiting for the finished product) you can have compost ready for your garden in as little as two months.

### **Great additions to your compost pile:**

Hay, Leaves, Grass clippings, Shredded paper, Cardboard, Dryer lint, Tea bags,

Egg shells don't always break down well, but they are great for your plants so keep adding them!

### **Do not add to your bin:**

Meat, Bones, Oils, Dairy (cheese, sour cream etc), Animal waste, Diseased plants, Citrus peels

Shells from shrimp or lobster can be composted, but do not add shells that have meat left in them.

### **More resources about composting:**

<http://cityofdavis.org/pw/compost/index.cfm>

<http://www.oregonmetro.gov/index.cfm/go/by.web/id=553>