COMPOST BASICS

The Benefits *OF* Composting

1. Less waste in landfills and water resources.
2. Improves the soil's ability to hold water and filter pollutants, and reduces the need to irrigate.
3. Makes nutrients more accessible to plants– healthy plants reduce soil erosion.
4. Sustainable way to improve soil and provide nutrients to plants.

Building *A* Compost Pile

Microbes consume what you add to the pile and turn it into compost. They depend on both carbon found in browns and the nitrogen from greens to thrive and produce compost. The best carbon to nitrogen ratio is 30:1 or less.

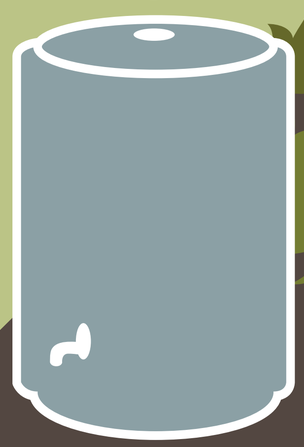
1. **On level ground**
2. **Well drained**
3. **Protected area**
4. **Near a source of water**
5. **Convenient to use**

Managing *YOUR* Pile

A new pile of brown and green materials will heat up rapidly as the microbes break down the materials. After 4–7 days, the amount of activity will begin to slow down, and the pile will cool. Turn your pile to ensure that all of the material pieces get turned to compost.

1. **Check temperature:** Turn if above 150 F or below 100 F
2. **Check moisture:** Moist, but not dripping. Add browns if too wet.
3. **Check smell:** Stinky means too many greens; add browns

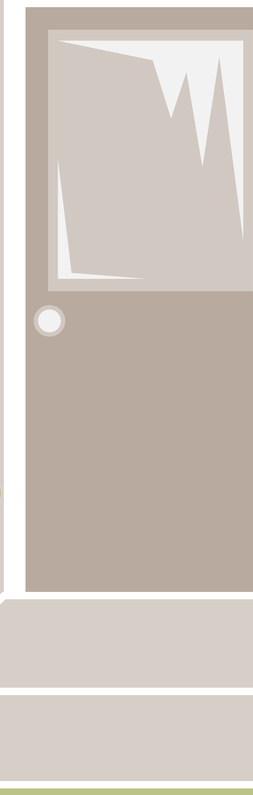
DO NOT Compost these:



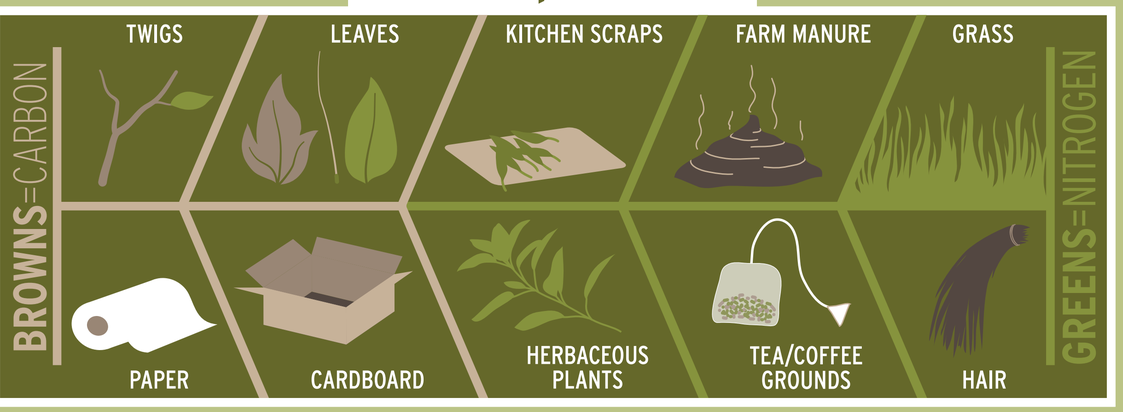
Using Compost

Once the compost is finished, it will smell like rich soil & appear dark and crumbly with few large pieces of identifiable materials. Screen your compost to remove large bits and return those to the pile.

1. **Soil Additive:** Mix into top 4–6 inches of soil
2. **Potting Mix:** Add with perlite or vermiculite to improve drainage
3. **Compost Tea:** Use a sock to soak compost in water, then fertilize plants



DO Compost these:



A Well Proportioned Pile

1. Layer roughly equal amounts of greens & browns in 3–4 inch tiers.
2. Water layers as you go: moist but not soaking.
3. Stop layering once you reach 3–5 feet in height.

Yard Waste Recycling

Leave yard waste in the yard! In natural ecosystems, all organic matter returns to and replenishes the soil after it dies. Yard waste can be chipped or cut into pieces and added to the pile or recycled.

Fallen leaves & pine needles	Shred with mower & leave on ground Use as mulch for tree & shrub beds Collect & compost
Grass clippings	Leave on lawn Collect & compost
Shrub prunings, plants & weeds	Shred or cut & add to compost
Tree limbs & woody shrub prunings	Shred & use as mulch Collect & compost

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Sarasota County