

Garden Compost Explained

Every wonder why some of the world's most beautiful natural gardens are found in the most remote places? It's because Mother Nature has done all the work! When you want to create a garden that's naturally lush and vibrant # without resorting to harsh chemicals # use nature's perfect fertilizer: garden composting .

Composting is the oldest method of fertilizing plants, from leafy shrubs and trees to exotic flowers. Take the rainforest, for example. The entire floor of the rainforest is a carpet of naturally occurring compost that's constantly providing shelter, support and food for all types of plant life.

It's easy to create your own perfect fertilizer just by saving food scraps and yard waste. You'll also save a load of money on garden center supplies, and you'll reduce waste. Creating your own garden compost is a win-win-win situation! When complete, your garden compost will be a dark, crumbly mixture of decomposed organic matter.

Creating garden compost is so easy to do, and just wait till you see how many ways it can benefit your blooms:

- * Provides essential nutrients to plants
- * Reduces the need for harsh fertilizers
- * Improves the quality of heavy clay or sandy soil
- * Reduces the amount of water required
- * Helps to control pesky weeds

Create Your Own Garden Compost

The recipe for garden compost is very basic. Always remember the gardener's rule of thumb: two parts brown, to one part green.

A compost pile is a bustling community of microorganisms that live by breaking down organic matter, like yard debris and organic scraps, and turn them into compost. You'll need to do your part to encourage the growth of these microorganisms. Use natural flower fertilizers that are two parts carbon-rich "brown" materials, such as dried leaves. Mix this with one-part nitrogen-rich "green" materials, such as grass clippings. The end result will be an all-natural fertilizer that's the perfect fuel for those hungry populations of microorganisms. Before long, they'll be heating up your yard debris and producing valuable garden compost.

Ingredients

Your "two parts brown" can contain any combination of the following materials:

- * Dried leaves and grass clippings
- * Small twigs
- * Shredded newspaper
- * Straw or hay
- * Wood chips, wood shavings or sawdust
- * Old potting soil

The "one part green" can include any or all of these healthy materials:

- * Fresh grass clippings
- * Newly fallen leaves
- * Plant stalks and stems
- * Hedge trimmings
- * Annual weeds (without the heads!)
- * Vegetable and fruit scraps
- * Coffee grounds, filters and tea bags
- * Egg shells

The following list of materials should NEVER be used in your compost:

- * Diseased plants
- * Weeds with see heads
- * Invasive weeds like quack grass and morning glory
- * Bread and cereal grains
- * Meat or fish parts or bones
- * Dairy products
- * Cooking oil or grease, or oily foods
- * Pet feces
- * Dead animals

Size Does Matter

The smaller your composting components are, the faster you will achieve a rich, usable compost. Obviously, large pieces of vegetables will take longer to break down than smaller pieces. Chop your leftover fruits and vegetables into small pieces. Garden debris should be cut up using garden shears or a machete. Use a garden chipper/shredder or a lawnmower mulching attachment to break up sticks and twigs.

For even faster garden compost action, your compost pile should be no less than three feet in diameter. Size is important, because the actual composting occurs from the heat generated by those millions of microorganisms living in your soil. As they process the raw materials, they release energy that helps to activate the decomposition. A compost pile of at least three square feet is the best size for hotter, faster composting.

Water and Air

Compost is a living thing, and it needs water and air to survive. The microorganisms in your garden compost can't do their jobs if they don't receive an ample supply of water and air. Regularly sprinkle water over your compost, but don't drown it. Make it about as wet as a damp sponge. To incorporate air into the garden compost, use a pitchfork to turn the compost materials one every week. This will also help to distribute the efforts of the microorganisms. Otherwise, you'll end up with a nice layer of compost at the bottom of the pile, and a heap of garden waste on top.

If you're looking for gardening advice, take it right from the source: Mother Nature herself. It's easy to make your own garden compost, and your bright, beautiful plants will be more than enough payment for your efforts.