

# Resources

## Free Workshops

Pre-registration is preferred for our composting workshops. See the current schedule on our website: [www.ucanr.edu/compost](http://www.ucanr.edu/compost)

## Books

- The Composting Handbook, 2022, Elsevier, Academic Press, 943 pp.
- Let it Rot! Stu Campbell, 1998, Garden Way Publishing, Pownal, VT, 144 pp.
- Rodale Book of Composting, 1992, G.Gershuny, Saint Martin's Press, New York, NY, 278 pp.

## About the Master Composter Program

The Composting Education Program teaches a 14–17-week training course in organic waste management to interested volunteers. Training consists of approximately 50 hours of classroom and hands-on instruction. Volunteers agree to give back 25-50 hours of volunteer service annually in the form of educational outreach.

Rotline: 408-918-4640

Website: [www.ucanr.edu/compost](http://www.ucanr.edu/compost)

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<https://reducewaste.sccgov.org>

# Basic Composting

Recycle your organic waste!



Composting Education Program  
COMMUNITY • HOME • CLASSROOM

[www.ucanr.edu/compost](http://www.ucanr.edu/compost)



# Why Compost?

Composting is nature's way of recycling. It is an efficient way to turn your vegetable, fruit, and yard trimmings into a rich soil amendment that improves your soil health, while benefiting the greater environment. Lower your carbon footprint by composting at home!

- **Saves you money** by lowering garbage bills and replacing store-bought soil conditioners.
- **Helps garden and house plants** by improving the fertility and health of your soil.
- **Saves water** by helping the soil hold moisture and reducing water runoff.
- **Reduces greenhouse gas emissions** by recycling valuable organic resources and diverting waste from entering the landfill.

- Reduce** – the amount of yard trimmings you make by planting slow-growing, drought-tolerant plants.
- Reuse** – yard trimmings by grasscycling (mowing more often and leaving the clippings on the lawn) and by mulching fallen leaves and chipped prunings
- Recycle** – remaining yard trimmings by composting. This brochure shows you how.
- Restore** – the environment with thriving gardens. It all starts at home.

# Using compost

Not only does composting help your garden & yard, but it's also good for house plants too! When compost looks like soil and smells sweet and earthy, it is ready to use. Here are some of the most common ways to use compost:

## In the Garden:

Before planting, mix a 4" to 8" layer of compost into newly reclaimed or poor soils. Mix a 1/2" to 3" layer of compost into annual garden beds at least once a year.

Compost will add nutrients and beneficial microbes, hold water and improve growth.

## Around the Yard:

Spread a 1" to 6" layer of coarse compost on soil as a mulch, or spread a 1/2" layer of sifted, seed-free compost on turfgrass as a topdressing. These can be done any time of year to improve soil fertility and reduce water needs.

## Don't Have a Garden?

You can still make compost and use it on a house plant, give it to a friend, sprinkle it around a street tree, or use it in a community garden. You can also make a great potting soil by mixing one part compost with two parts sand and/ or soil.



# Choose a System

## SYSTEMS FOR FOOD AND YARD TRIMMINGS

### Rodent-resistant bins

- For fruit, vegetable, and yard trimmings (using "mixed" composting recipe)
- For yard trimmings alone (using "no-fuss recipe")
- Bins require sides, lid, and no holes bigger than 1/4"
- Try placing a piece of hardware cloth under the bin to block rodent activity from underneath

### Open piles and simple bins

- For yard trimmings only
- Requires "active" composting, including chopping the materials and turning the piles regularly
- Usually inexpensive or free

## SYSTEMS FOR JUST FOOD WASTE

For more information, see the Worm Composting & Other Methods brochure.



### Worm bins

- For indoors or outdoors
- Produces worm castings, a slow-release nitrogen-rich fertilizer

# Follow the Basics

Thanks to friendly bugs and worms, composting is as easy as "1-2-3" - no matter which recipe you use!

- 1** **CHOP** materials if you want them to break-down more quickly.
- 2** **MIX** or layer "browns" (dry, woody materials) with "greens" (moist, green materials)
- 3** **MAINTAIN** air & water balance by keeping compost as moist as a wrung-out sponge

**Browns, greens, air & water** are the "big four" that will keep every compost pile happy.

DO COMPOST	DON'T COMPOST
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Most sawdusts	Meat, bones, or fish
Chopped, woody prunings	Dairy products or grease
Pine needles	Dog, cat, or bird feces
Fallen leaves	Sawdust from treated wood
Tea bags	Diseased plants or weeds (in cold piles)
Citrus rinds	
Coffee grounds & filters	
Lawn clippings & young weeds	
Fruit & vegetable trimmings	
Herbivore manures	

Hot compost happens when you follow the basic "1-2-3" steps carefully, and the pile has a volume of at least one cubic yard. Heat can accelerate composting and destroy seeds and plant diseases, but it is not necessary. Cold, slow piles are just as good. For faster hot composting, turn or mix and water your hot pile about once per week.

# Compost Recipes



## "No-Fuss" or cold composting:

For yard trimmings ONLY. Requires a rodent-resistant bin to prevent animal nesting.

### Ingredients:

Yard trimmings only (browns & greens), water as needed and aerate.

### Directions:

Feed chopped or un-chopped yard trimmings into bin as you generate them. Maintain compost by keeping it as moist as a wrung-out sponge. Harvest rich, brown, finished compost from the bottom and center of the pile after 12 to 18 months.

## "Mixed" composting:

For fruit, vegetable & yard trimmings together. This recipe requires a rodent-resistant bin and active maintenance to prevent animal nesting and feeding.

### Ingredients:

Fruit, vegetable & yard trimmings (browns & greens), water as needed.

### Directions:

Feed yard trimmings to your compost by chopping them into small pieces (woody material 1" diameter or smaller) or grind them, then mix them into the pile. Fill the bin. Food scraps need to be buried and mixed into the center of the pile. Never dump and run! Be sure to mix in enough browns to balance your greens. Feed as often as you like. Maintain compost by turning or mixing it about once a week. Keep it moist as a wrung-out sponge. Harvest finished compost by sifting out coarse, unfinished materials after 3 to 8 months.

## "Active" or hot composting:

For yard trimmings ONLY. In open piles & simple bins, active maintenance prevents animal nesting.

### Ingredients:

Yard trimmings only (browns & greens), water as needed.

### Directions:

Feed yard trimmings to your compost by chopping them into small pieces (woody material 1" diameter or smaller) or grind them, then mix them into the pile. Fill a bin that is at least one cubic yard by volume. Be sure to balance browns with greens. Maintain pile by turning or mixing it once a week. Keep it as moist as a wrung-out sponge. Covering it with a tarp will help keep it moist. Harvest rich, brown, finished compost by sifting out coarse, unfinished materials after 3 to 8 months

## Troubleshooting:

Symptoms	Problems	Solutions
Pile not composting	Too dry	Add water until slightly damp & turn (mix)
	Too much brown matter	Add fresh green matter or organic nitrogen fertilizer & turn
Pile smells rotten/filthyracts	Too wet/ too many food scraps or lawn clippings	Turn & add browns (dry, woody materials & or dry soil)
	Food scraps exposed	Bury & mix food scraps into pile
	See "Don't Compost"	Remove meat, dairy, grease, & turn
Rodents in pile	Foodscraps in open bin/holes larger than 1/4 in non-compostables	Use traps or baits rodent-proof bin, remove meat, grease, etc. & turn

