



UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
Agriculture and Natural Resources
UC Master Gardeners of Napa County

Healthy Garden Tips

napamg.ucanr.edu
707-253-4221

COMPOST TROUBLESHOOTING GUIDE

PROBLEM	CAUSE	SOLUTION
Bad odor (rotten smell)	Too much moisture	Turn the compost or add dry, porous material, like straw.
Bad odor (ammonia smell)	Too much nitrogen compared to carbon.	Add high-carbon materials, like straw, sawdust, wood chips or dry leaves.
	Compacted leaves	Turn the compost to make the pile smaller.
	Inadequate air	Turn the compost
Low compost temperature	Pile too small	Increase size, insulate sides
	Too little moisture	Turn the compost and mix in dry materials.
	Too little air	Turn the compost.
	Lack of nitrogen	Mix in nitrogen sources like grass clippings, manure or fertilizer.
	Cold weather	Increase pile size or insulate pile with a layer of straw or plastic.
	Particle size too large	Chip or ground materials.
Pile is dry throughout	Not enough water; too much wood material	Turn pile and moisten material; add fresh materials; cover pile
Compost pile is damp and warm in middle but nowhere else	Pile is too small	Collect more material and mix the old ingredients into a new pile, then moisten.
Pest infestation – dogs, rodents, insects	Improper food scraps added	Don't add meat, fats, bones or other animal products.
	Food scraps not covered	Place fruit and vegetable scraps in the center of pile, cover with soil.
Neighbor complains	Compost pile is ugly	Cover with pretty bedspread or throw flowers on it.