

Why compost?

- Waste less.** About 30 percent of what South Carolinians throw away is yard debris and food waste. Composting keeps this material out of landfills and turns it into a product you can use.
- Go natural.** Reduce or eliminate the need for chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Compost contains valuable nutrients that feed your plants. It also helps suppress plant diseases and pests.
- Save money.** By making your own valuable compost at home, you can reduce your need to water and buy products such as chemical fertilizer, pesticides and bags for garbage and leaves.
- It's easy!** To start, all you need is a little time, a little space and this guide to help create your own compost.



What do I need to get started?

- Bin or pile?** A pile works great for leaves and grass clippings, but when you want to incorporate food waste, consider enclosing your pile to keep out rodents. Homemade bins can be built easily with materials you already have such as scrap wood, chicken wire or even concrete blocks. If you want to buy one, manufactured bins come in different shapes and sizes and some rotate to make mixing easier. Look for a bin that has a lid and air vents, is rodent-resistant, holds heat well and has a bottom door to remove finished compost. Check your local nursery or garden center for a bin that fits your needs.
- Space.** Select a dry, partly shady spot near a water source and preferably out of sight. Be sure to keep your pile or bin at least 2 feet away from structures like your house or a fence. Ideally, your compost area should be at least 3 feet wide by 3 feet deep by 3 feet tall (one cubic yard). This size provides enough food and insulation to keep the organisms in the compost working hard.
- Browns.** Compost requires a good mix of carbon and nitrogen-rich material. "Browns" provide carbon and include material such as paper, cardboard and paper rolls, dry yard waste, straw, sawdust and used potting soil. Add about twice as much brown material as green material to your bin or pile.
- Greens.** "Greens" provides nitrogen and include material such as wet yard trimmings like fresh grass clippings and green leaves, vegetable and fruit scraps, coffee grounds and tea bags.
- Air.** The bacterium needs (or plural, bacteria need) air to break down the organic material in your compost pile. Without it, your pile may decompose slowly and produce odors. Turn your pile by rotating your bin or using a shovel or pitchfork. You can even use a compost turner, which is specially designed to fit inside a compost bin.
- Water.** The right amount of moisture is important to keep your compost pile active. Too little moisture will cause the pile to decompose slowly. Too much moisture will cause the pile to smell. Here's a simple rule to follow: keep your pile damp – like a wrung-out sponge.



What can go into my compost pile?

While many materials can be composted, some items should not go in your home compost pile to keep it odor, pest and disease-free.

WHAT TO ADD

Greens:

- ✓ Uncooked or cooked fruits and vegetables
- ✓ Breads
- ✓ Coffee grounds and filters
- ✓ Grass clippings
- ✓ Tea bags (with the staple removed)

- ✓ Hair and fur

- ✓ Chicken, rabbit, cow and horse manure

Browns:

- ✓ Dryer and vacuum cleaner lint
- ✓ Eggshells
- ✓ Nut shells
- ✓ Fireplace ash

- ✓ Sawdust and wood chips (untreated)

- ✓ Hay and straw

- ✓ Yard trimmings (e.g., leaves, small branches, twigs)

- ✓ Houseplants and used potting soil

- ✓ Shredded newspaper, cardboard and paper

WHAT NOT TO ADD

- ✗ Metal, glass and plastic
- ✗ Fruit and vegetable stickers
- ✗ Dairy products
- ✗ Fats, grease, lard or oils
- ✗ Meat, bones or seafood scraps
- ✗ Dog, cat or human waste (e.g., diapers)
- ✗ Fresh weeds or weed roots
- ✗ Diseased or infected plants
- ✗ Trimmings that are toxic to other plants (e.g., black walnut, hemlock)
- ✗ Coal or charcoal ash
- ✗ Treated or painted wood

