

If you experience problems with your home compost pile, consider the following troubleshooting solutions:

## Troubleshooting Your Compost Pile

PROBLEM	SOLUTION
• Compost smells foul.	• Turn the pile and add more browns.
• Compost is too wet.	• Turn the pile and add more dry material.
• Compost is too dry.	• Turn the pile, add water, then shade.
• Compost is cool to the touch.	• Add more greens.

5. The compost will be ready for use anywhere from 6 to 18 months depending on how the compost is managed. The compost is ready when it looks dark and crumbly, does not emit foul odors, and the starting materials are no longer visible.

Compost can be applied directly around the base of trees and shrubs to serve as mulch. Compost can also be applied to the top 6 inches of the soil to help moisture retention and increase nutrients. Compost can be applied directly to the lawn. It will help stimulate biological activity in the turf. Potting soil can be created from compost by screening it through a ½" sieve and combining the compost with equal parts of sand and loam.

## Internet Resources

The MDEQ website at [www.deq.state.ms.us/solidwaste](http://www.deq.state.ms.us/solidwaste)  
[www.composting101.com](http://www.composting101.com)  
[www.compostingcouncil.org](http://www.compostingcouncil.org)  
[www.epa.gov/compost](http://www.epa.gov/compost)

For more information and resources, search the internet for "home or backyard composting".



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# Home Composting Made Easy

Mississippi Department of  
Environmental Quality

## What is Compost?

Compost is a dark, crumbly, and earthy-smelling material made up of decomposed organic matter. Compost is generated by a biological process in which naturally occurring microorganisms and bacteria break down organic materials such as food scraps, leaves, grass clippings, and wood chips. Composting is our way of speeding up Mother Nature's decomposition process – a natural form of recycling. In addition, the process produces a valuable organic material that can enhance plant growth in lawns and homes.

## Why Compost?

There are many benefits to composting. It is a simple and inexpensive way to dispose of and recycle food scraps and yard waste that would otherwise enter the waste stream and be disposed in landfills. Composting also helps improve the health and quality of the soils to which it is added. These and other benefits are listed below:



### COMPOSTING BENEFITS

- Reduces the volume of household garbage and other wastes going into our landfills.
- Saves money on disposal costs.
- Reduces methane gas generation from the landfill.
- Enriches and adds nutrients to the soil.
- Improves soil structure and porosity for better root growth.
- Balances acidity and alkalinity (pH) of the soil.
- Suppresses disease and harmful pests.
- Reduces the need for chemical fertilizers and other commercial soil additives.

## How to Compost

1. Choose an area of about 4 x 4 x 4 feet that is not in direct sunlight and is an easily accessible site on grass or soil. Choose a compost pile site that is away from your house.
2. Identify the household organic materials that you generate that can be composted and the items that are not suitable for your home compost pile.



- Any vegetable or fruit scraps
- Egg shells
- Coffee grounds and filters
- Tea Bags (remove staples)
- Newspaper, paper towels
- Leaves and grass clippings
- Fireplace ashes
- Old plants or wilted flowers



- Meat, fish or bones
- Dairy products
- Diseased plants
- Pet waste, cat litter
- Fats, oils, and grease
- Charcoal ash
- Grass clippings treated with herbicides
- Non-organic material like plastic and metal

### WHEN IN DOUBT, LEAVE IT OUT!

If you are not certain whether a material should be added to your compost pile then do not add it, and discard it in your trash.

3. To get started you want to begin with a proper balance between carbon-based materials (browns) and nitrogen-based materials (greens). Both green and brown materials have carbon but greens contain a lot more nitrogen. It is recommended that you maintain a 50/50 ratio of browns to greens with generally a little more brown material than green. To start composting, alternate placing 2" to 4" layers of brown material and similar layers of green material in your pile.

**BROWN MATERIALS** include: dried grass, dried leaves, straw, wood chips (untreated wood)

**GREEN MATERIALS** include: fruit & vegetable scraps, coffee grounds, tea bags, eggshells

You may want to chop or cut up some of your organic debris or food wastes into smaller pieces for placement in the compost pile. Don't worry if your mixture percentage is off at times. Compost will break down over time no matter what. It just may take longer. Add water to the compost pile as needed.

Generally, the pile should stay as wet as a wrung sponge - damp but not soggy. Don't let your compost pile dry out, or you may lose nutrients. Continue to add food scraps year-round by incorporating them or burying them in the pile and providing more brown material as needed.

4. Manage your home compost pile through either active or passive composting processes. Active composting requires that you turn or stir the pile regularly to aerate the compost material. Active composting will produce compost in a much quicker timeframe. Passive composting is virtually labor-free. It simply requires placing the organic material in a holding bin and allowing the natural decomposition process to occur. Passive composting requires between 8 to 12 months to produce the finished compost material.