When Will My Compost Be Ready for Use?

Depending on the compost method you use, your compost can be ready for use in 3-12 months.

Compost is ready for use when you are unable to recognize the original materials, when it is dark brown or black, and has an earthy smell.

What Do I Do With It?

- **Feed your lawn:** rake a layer of compost onto your lawn, about 1/4 in. thick.
- **Use it in your garden:** spread it around the base of shrubs, trees and flowers.
- **Share it with your neighbors or your local community garden!**

For more information about your local community garden, visit www.greensboro-nc.gov/communitygardens

TROUBLESHOOTING

SYMPTOM	PROBLEM	SOLUTION
Rotten egg smell	Not enough air or pile is too wet	Turn pile; Add more 'browns'
Ammonia smell	Too much nitrogen	Add more 'browns'
Pile is attracting animals or insects	Food scraps are not covered well or meat/dairy products are present	Cover with brown leaves, wood chips, or finished compost; keep meat/dairy out of pile
Pile is not heating up; is decomposing very slowly	Pile is too small	Add more organic matter
	Not enough nitrogen	Add food waste, grass clippings or manure
	Not enough moisture	Turn pile and add water
	Not enough air	Turn pile

GREENSBORO

NEED MORE INFORMATION?
Visit greensboro-nc.gov/compost and compost.ces.ncsu.edu

GREENSBORO

City of Greensboro's Beginner Guide to Backyard Composting

Compost helps your garden, your community, and your wallet!

What Is Compost?

Compost is the rich material that is made when organic matter breaks down and makes a great additive to your soil. Organic materials include grass clippings, food scraps, and garden waste. Compost is nutrient-rich, so it fuels plant growth and restores depleted soil.

How Do I Use Compost?

Since compost is a soil conditioner and fertilizer, you can use it as a potting mixture, in your garden, around shrubs and trees, on borders, in flower beds and as mulch.

What Is Backyard Composting?

Backyard composting is a way to speed up nature's decomposition process by creating ideal conditions for microbes to thrive. A backyard compost creates a moist environment with lots of air pockets.

How Does It Work?

During the first 4-6 weeks of your compost pile, bacteria and fungi eat through the waste, multiply rapidly and generate heat. Then the pile cools down and larger bugs, like beetles and worms eat their way through tougher materials. It takes 3-12 months to complete the process and turn food and garden scraps into compost depending on the compost method you choose.

Why Should I Compost?

- **Over 25% of typical household waste is yard trimmings and food scraps**
- **It improves your lawn or garden**
- **It saves money on fertilizer**
- **It's clean, simple, cheap and easy**

Getting Started - Choose Your Method

There are many types of compost methods - choose the one that works best for the amount of space and time you have.

- **You can build a bin from wood, wire or cinderblocks.**
- **Or purchase a tumbler or drum from garden stores.**
- **Make a designated area in your yard the 'compost pile'—no bin required.**
- **Be sure your bin will hold at least 1 cubic yard (3' by 3' by 3') of material.**

Choose Your Location

Set up your bin in a convenient, shaded or partly sunny area with access to water or a hose. You may want to start your compost pile close to where you'll be using the compost when it is ready.

Fill Your Bin With A Balanced Mixture

Compostable materials fall into two categories: greens (nitrogen-rich) and browns (carbon-rich). The ideal compost pile contains alternate layers of greens and browns. Greens provide proteins that allow microbes to grow, while browns fuel the composting process.

Try to ensure 3 parts "browns" to 1 part "greens"

How to Manage

You can choose to manage your pile as much or as little as you'd like.

For best results:

- **TURNING**
  If you turn your pile every week or two, it will decompose more evenly and quickly. Using a pitchfork or shovel, try to incorporate materials into the center of the pile over time.
- **MOISTURE**
  Keep your compost moist and well-aerated. The material should feel like a wrung out sponge when touched.
- **TEMPERATURE**
  If you reach your hand into the center of the pile, it should feel hot.
- **Add new materials to your bin or pile by mixing them in, rather than putting them on top.**

Information provided by the NC Cooperative Extension. Visit www.compost.ces.ncsu.edu for more details about how to compost.

GREENS

- Fruits and vegetables
- Crushed egg shells
- Coffee grounds and filters
- Teabags
- Breads and grains
- Grass clippings
- Fur and hair
- Garden trimmings
- Manure from animals that don't eat meat

BROWNS

- Leaves
- Paper towels
- Shredded paper and cardboard
- Straw
- Branches and twigs
- Sawdust
- Wood chips
- Nutshells

Materials to avoid :

- Meat and dairy products
- Bones
- Fat, grease, lard or oils
- Dog and cat waste
- Invasive weeds
- PLU stickers on fruits and vegetables
- Pesticides
- Coal or charcoal ash