

Why compost?

The Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality strongly discourages open burning of yard waste. Composting your yard waste instead of burning:

- eliminates the need to burn leaves and yard trimmings.
- reduces the occurrence of out-of-control fires.
- helps maintain good air quality.
- produces rich soil additives for yards and gardens.

Compost improves soil structure and adds nutrients. It also:

- makes clay soil drain better.
- makes sandy soil hold more water.

Compost is a gardener's best friend!



**White River
Regional Solid Waste
Management District**

Backyard Composting:

Nature's Way
of Recycling



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**An Easy-To-Follow
Guide To Home
Composting**

What is compost?

Compost is organic material decomposed to the point plants in the soil can use its nutrients. In nature, leaves and limbs pile up and rot over time. Home composting can accomplish the same thing but in a faster and more convenient manner.

What you will need

- **A place to pile or stack yard waste.** For faster compost, use a holding unit that allows air flow on the side. Inexpensive units can be made of wooden pallets tied together or wire fence tied in a circle. Size counts—it should be no smaller than 3'x3'x3' to maintain heat generated during the decomposition process. Make sure your bin has openings on the bottom to attract worms and other decomposers.
- **A garden fork, shovel or spade** for turning your materials. Mix regularly for a faster cure time.
- **Access to a water hose** to add moisture during dry times. Ideal moisture levels are like that of a wrung-out sponge.

For fast composting

Loosen the soil before setting up your pile or bin. Repeat layers of the following items, adding water as you go:

- 6" of straw or dried material for air flow
- 4" of green waste (grass, leaves, etc.)
- 2" of old compost or soil
- 3 to 6" of dry (brown) carbon materials

Turn compost weekly, outside to inside and top to bottom. The material will generate heat during the decomposition process. Keep moist but not soggy. Cover during heavy rain periods.

The compost pile

Both carbon (brown or dried items) and nitrogen (green or moist) are necessary for the decomposition process. A good example is mixing 1/2 to 3/4 carbon waste with 1/4 to 1/2 nitrogen waste.

Use

Grass, Leaves
Yard Trimmings
Fruits, Vegetables¹
Coffee Grounds
Egg Shells
Bark, Sawdust
Wood Ashes

Don't Use²

Meat, Dairy, Fats
Plants Gone to Seed
Diseased Plants
Large Twigs, Wood
Animal, Fish Bones.
Cat Litter
Pet Waste

¹When adding vegetable scraps, bury or cover them to prevent odor and pests.

²Proteins and fats attract pests. Some plant seeds could survive and spread with compost. Diseased plants and pet feces may contain harmful organisms. Large wood items decompose too slowly.

Using compost

Compost is a gardener's best friend! Common uses include:

- **Add to the soil** in flower, shrub and vegetable gardens.
- **Use as mulch** around trees and shrubs.
- **Work 2" of compost** into topsoil layer to improve heavy clay and sandy soils.
- **Combine with potting soil** for wonderful potted flowers and plants! For potting mix, remove larger chunks with a 1/2" screen or sieve and combine with topsoil or potting soil.

Visit WhiteRiverRecycles.org for information and resources for successful composting.

Knowing when it is ready

Compost is ready when it has the dark look of mulch or soil. You can take finished compost off the bottom of the bin or pile, or start a new unit and let the existing one continue to decompose. It is "cooked" when it no longer generates heat after being turned. Let it cure an additional two weeks before using.

Troubleshooting

- **Compost pile smells:** Not enough air, too wet. Turn it and add dry, coarse stalks and straw.
- **Pile is damp but will not heat up:** Lack of nitrogen. Add fresh grass or food waste.
- **Center of pile is dry:** Add moisture, grass and food waste and turn.
- **Pile is moist only in the center:** It may be too small. Add more material and mix.
- **Pests (birds, animals, rats, etc.):** Remove any fish, meat or dairy. Cover and bury scraps well.

Other options

- **Not in a big hurry?** Heap materials up in pile at least 3 feet high. You do not have to layer materials. Add materials when available and turn under when adding vegetable waste. It will cure over time.
- **Leave cut grass in place.** Use a mulching mower on your lawn. Set your blade higher and mow more often, leaving grass clippings in place as a nitrogen additive. Mulch leaves with your mower in the fall.
- **Too many food scraps?** Consider worm composting. Visit ADEQ.state.ar.us or Division.UAEX.edu/publications.htm for information on vermicomposting.