



# Composting

Compost is what we call the sweet, earthy-smelling, crumbly material created when organic matter such as fresh grass clippings, dead leaves and fallen twigs decompose over time. Oxygen from air, water from rain, insects and soil microorganisms are all essential contributors to this natural process. Imagine the rich compost you would find on the soft floor of a deciduous forest. It would be nutrient-rich and teeming with microscopic organisms that vitalize the soil of the forest. Our Demonstration Compost Garden offers a perfect example of how this process can be mimicked on a smaller scale, and you can do the same in your home garden!

## WHAT TO DO IF... ?

### Smelly compost?

- Too much water. Add more dry material to the mix (which could include the addition of shredded paper or cardboard) to help absorb the extra damp.
- Too much fresh green material (which means too much nitrogen). The addition of more dry material will rebalance the mix and solve the problem.

### Taking a long time?

- Too dry. Add water to promote microbial activity and the natural generation of heat within the pile.
- Not enough oxygen exposure. Turn the pile occasionally to speed up the process. Materials will decompose if the pile is not turned, but the process takes much longer.

When you visit our demonstration gardens, you will find the compost area conveniently located near a garden that thrives when compost is added — the Vegetable Garden! We have built several bins to keep our compost piles discrete and tidy. To generate compost, each bin is filled until approximately  $\frac{3}{4}$  full with a mix of 30% fresh green materials from plant trimmings (weeds and any diseased materials are not allowed), and 70% dry material – primarily dry leaves and twigs that have been cut to a small size. (Note: vegetable scraps, crushed egg shells and coffee grounds can also be used as green materials.)

Once the materials are in the bin, proper amounts of water and air exposure will promote microbial activity and the natural generation of heat within the pile. In this heated environment, materials will decompose to produce compost. In our garden, the entire process takes 3–4 months. When one bin is full, another is started so that compost is continually being made and our other gardens continually benefit from a regular compost dressing.

There are a few additional steps to our composting process. To promote microbial action, a few shovels of composted manure is added to our piles about four times each year. This is not a requirement for a home compost pile, but it does help inoculate the pile with additional microbes to encourage and promote faster decomposition of organic matter. We also turn our compost pile occasionally to ensure optimal exposure of materials to oxygen.

We invite you to visit our Compost Garden to see just how easy it can be to create your own. While we use bins, you may want to use an open pile or purchase a compost tumbler. Regardless, the basic process will be the same and the rich rewards will be yours to claim. Happy composting!

## QUESTIONS?

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