

# Building a Compost Pile

1. Start the pile with a layer of coarse material like branches and twigs to allow air flow to the pile.
2. For a carbon source, add 6 Inches of leaves and other woody materials. For a nitrogen source, add 2-3 Inches of grass clippings, kitchen wastes and garden wastes. Mix these two layers to speed up decomposition and then cover with 2 Inches of dirt to control odors.
3. Dampen the pile with water as new layers are added or more frequently if the weather is dry. The pile should be concave in the center to prevent runoff of water. The moisture content is sufficient when the surface of the pile glistens.
4. To speed up decomposition, mix/turn the pile once a week and periodically sprinkle it with water to keep it moist.
5. When the interior of the pile is no longer hot and the material has broken down into dark, crumbly soil, the composting is finished. This process usually takes 3-6 months.

## Using Finished Compost

- When added to soil, compost improves the physical, chemical, and biological properties of the soil.
- Compost can be used as a soil supplement in:
  - Flower beds
  - Vegetable gardens
  - Lawns
  - Planting a new tree or shrub
  - Seed starting mix
- Add 1-2 Inches of compost to the top 6-8 Inches of topsoil and mix

Compost can be used as a mulch, which adds nutrients and improves soil structure

- Its main purpose is to help conserve moisture, prevent erosion, and reduce weed growth.
- Apply a 306 Inch layer of compost around the base of the plant.

For more information  
call 319-266-8722 or  
see  
[www.wastetrac.org](http://www.wastetrac.org)



Black Hawk  
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# Composting at Home

The basics of  
composting



# A Guide to Building & Maintaining Your Own Compost Pile

## What Is composting?

- Composting is the controlled breakdown of biodegradable yard and kitchen wastes
- Compost is generally dark in color, resembles topsoil, and makes a useful soil conditioner
- Success in composting depends upon sufficient moisture and oxygen as well as proper amounts of carbon and nitrogen

## Recommended Materials

### Kitchen Wastes

- Fruit skins/cores/rinds
- Coffee grounds and filters
- Tea bags
- Raw vegetable scraps
- Corn Husks

### Yard Wastes

- Leaves
- Grass Clippings
- Trees
- Plant/Shrub Trimmings
- Woodchips/Sawdust
- Garden Trimmings

## Not Recommended Materials

According to the Iowa City Code, the following materials are not allowed in home compost piles. While all of these materials will eventually break down, they easily attract animals and emit odors and should be avoided:

- Meat
- Fats
- Oils
- Raw manure
- Bones
- Grease
- Dairy Products

## Choosing a Container

To prevent materials from blowing away, a container or enclosure of some sort must be used.

Examples:

- Flexible wire panels
- Bricks or cement blocks
- Wood frames
- Plastic bins
- Tumbler bins



## Location of Compost Pile

Iowa City Code lists the following requirements for the placement of a compost pile:

- Should be screened from street view  
In a confined area no larger than 25 square feet in area
- Should be located no less than 20 feet from a house and at least 5 feet from a property boundary line or any wood structure, excluding fences
- Should not be located in a drainage way or in an area between a building and the street right-of-way.
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