STEPS IN BACKYARD COMPOSTING

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By following these directions you can help accelerate the natural decomposition process to produce compost from your own backyard!

Step 1: Obtain a bin or designate an area in your yard that is approximately one cubic yard (3x ft. x 3 ft. x 3ft.)

Size is important to achieve the proper temperature. Piles that are too small cannot hold enough heat for effective microbial activity, and piles too large (more than 5 feet cubed) do not allow for enough air to reach microbes in the center of the pile.

Step 2: Mix two parts "brown" content (dry leaves, small twigs, straw, etc.) with one part "green" content (grass clippings, kitchen scraps, etc.)

This 2:1 ratio in volume provides the best mix of carbon (brown materials) to nitrogen (greens).

Step 3: Chop or break up twigs and large pieces of fruit and vegetable waste

Materials will break down more quickly with increased surface area. Half- to one-inch pieces are best for optimal decomposition.

Step 4: Keep it moist

Water your compost when needed to keep it damp, like a wrung-out sponge (not soggy). Here in Colorado, you may have to water your pile more frequently than you expect, given the dry climate. One way to mitigate moisture loss is to choose or build a compost bin with a top and enclosed sides (with holes for aeration).

Step 5: Keep it turning

Compost needs air. Turning the compost will help it break down and prevent unpleasant odors. In warmer months, compost should be turned every two weeks or so. In the winter, it is best to leave the pile as undisturbed as possible so it will retain heat. When adding material, dig a small well in the top or side of the pile, place material in, and cover, so the pile does not lose too much heat.

Use your compost!

When it is ready, your compost should look like dark, rich soil and smell earthy, like a forest after the rain. Use finished compost to feed your garden, flowers, potted plants, and lawn! You can apply it as a top dressing, mix it into the first few inches of soil, or when you are digging a hole to add an established plant or a new sapling, you can mix some compost into the hole with the resident soil. The most common backyard composting problem is unpleasant, strong odors which indicate a lack of oxygen in the compost, usually caused by overloading your pile with food waste that causes the content to become too wet. Solution: Stop adding food waste until the worms and micro-organisms have broken down what food is in there, and gently stir up the entire contents to allow more air in.

BACKYARD COMPOST GUIDELINES

Once you've set up your backyard compost bin or pile, use the following guidelines to help you keep an optimal mixture of carbon (browns) and nitrogen (greens). **Maintain a 2:1 ratio of "BROWN" to "GREEN" content,** and make sure all materials added to your compost pile or bin are no bigger than 2 inches.

BROWNS

Dry leaves

Wood chips

Grass, straw, and hay

Dry pine needles

Weeds (before seeding)

Sawdust

Napkins, paper towels, and tissues (if no toxic chemicals are absorbed)

GREENS

Fruit and vegetable scraps

Fresh grass clippings

Freshly fallen leaves

Coffee grounds and filters (preferably unbleached)

Eggshells (no eggs)

Loose leaf tea (no tea bags)

Perennial plant clippings

KEEP IT OUT!

Many of the following items may attract wildlife, or create contamination in your compost pile. Keep them out!

NO meat, fish, or bones

NO oily or greasy foods

Eggs (eggshells ok)

NO cheese, yogurt, or other dairy

NO compostable serviceware

NO:

Pet waste
Vacuum waste
Dryer lint
Tea bags

When in doubt, give us a shout! Call Eco-Cycle at (303) 444-6634 with questions.

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