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Home Composting Basics

Composting is one of the single most important acts an individual can do for the environment—spread your knowledge!!

Livingston Ordinance '08 – compost piles and structures are prohibited in front or side yards

What is composting? Composting is the transformation of organic material (plant matter) through decomposition, into a soil-like dark humus-rich material—“black gold.”

Micro-organisms in composting need:

Balanced diet – nitrogen and carbon rich sources

Water

Oxygen

1. Mix together the “Browns” and the “Greens” in your bin or other structure

Greens /Wets (nitrogen rich for protein synthesis) – vegetable and fruit scraps, egg shells, coffee grounds and filters, tea bags, nut shells, hair, parts of plants, grass clippings, green leaves, weeds (may need special treatment), manure from grass-eating animals (rabbit, cow, horse, sheep, goats, deer, chickens)

Browns/Dries (carbon rich for energy source) – (good for nutrition, also aeration) egg cartons, paper, shredded paper, cardboard, toilet paper rolls, dryer lint, brown leaves, shrub trimmings, vines, dried cornstalks (shredded) wood chips, sawdust (small quantities, not chemically treated wood)

NO – meat, fish, bones, dairy such as cheese; fats, grease or cooking oils; human, cat or dog feces; diseased plants, invasive weeds (quack grass, bindweed, Japanese knotweed, etc.), BBQ ashes or coal

➤ **For example**, fill a bin mixing half brown leaves and half grass clippings, add kitchen scraps

2. Add water as needed – Keep as moist as a wrung-out sponge. Add water as needed or leave off top when it's going to rain. Mix well.

If not enough water – won't decompose quickly.

If too much water – won't get enough oxygen and will turn anaerobic, starting to smell bad. Add leaves or other browns.

3. **Aerate for oxygen** – **Aerate** (turn or mix) every 7-10 days; microscopic organisms in center will get more air. (Besides bringing oxygen, this also distributes the moisture.) If not enough oxygen compost will turn anaerobic and have a foul smell.
4. **Harvest finished compost** – (will be dark brown, coarse, crumbly material with a fresh, earthy smell, can't see the original ingredients) May take 6 weeks to 6 months. Can be used for:
 - Soil building (mix in 2-4 weeks before planting if possible) Improves both sandy and clay soils.
 - Garden fertilizer – put around plants
 - Lawn feeding – can sieve if you want, not necessary
 - Potting mix (“sterilize” if starting seedlings – microwave, bake or pour boiling water over it)

Further Information, see www.howtocompost.com – great articles and links to other composting sites