

# Gardening Basics

## LESSON 4: COMPOSTING

### Set Up Options: Plastic Compost Bins

#### Pros:

- Most common way to compost for beginners
- Available to purchase at most hardware or garden supply stores
- Great for smaller spaces
- Easy access trap door for removing finished compost

#### Cons:

- Can dry out quickly
- Difficult to turn
- Can attract rodents
- Can be expensive



### Set Up Options: Open Air Three Stage Composting

Three separate bins allow for compost to be separated into fresh, middle, and finished product.

#### Pros:

- Large and easy to turn means decomposition happens quickly
- Always have finished compost available to use
- Doesn't dry out as easily

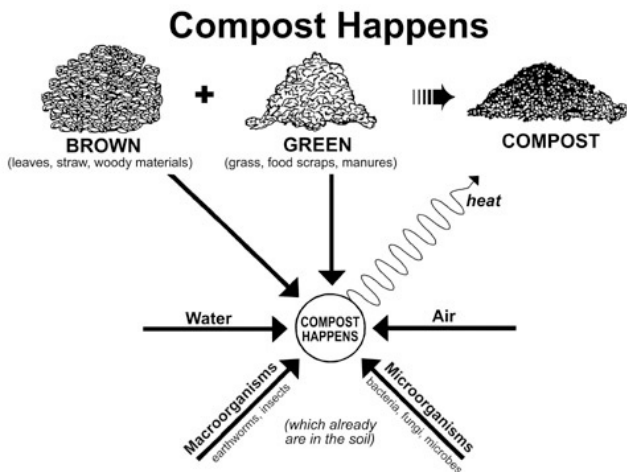
#### Cons:

- Can attract rodents
- Very large for smaller garden spaces and households that do not produce much food waste
- More labour intensive
- Building may require carpentry knowledge and tools



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Source: University of Georgia Extension

**No matter what set up you decide to use, composting requires some key ingredients to start things off:**

- CARBON and NITROGEN – the most important concepts!
- Balancing these components is important for healthy compost
- Materials containing carbon are things like straw, wood chips, dry leaves; mostly brown and dry materials
- Materials containing nitrogen are things like grass clippings, food waste and green waste
- Carbon to Nitrogen – 30:1

### Getting Started

- Always start a new compost with a good layer of carbon materials on the bottom
- A good ratio ensures that the right types of bacteria thrive
- Compost needs moisture: the texture of a rung-out sponge – moist, but not soggy
- A good way to jump start beneficial bacteria is by adding a few handfuls of mature compost



### Benefits of Composting

- Compost is one of the best sources of trace minerals (needed in smaller amounts) for your garden, and a great source of macro nutrients as well
- Helps retain moisture and adds beneficial microorganisms to your soil
- Reduces the need for chemical fertilizers
- Reduces landfill waste!

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### Compost Do's and Don'ts

#### Do:

- Alternate layers of carbon and nitrogen rich materials
- Cut larger material into smaller pieces so it can decompose more readily
- Make sure your compost stays evenly moist
- Turn your compost pile often! This helps material break down and ensures your pile stays aerated. Average sized piles should be turned every 1-2 weeks
- Add things like egg shells, veggie scraps and coffee grinds

#### Don't:

- Add items like meat products (bones included), oils or fats, bread, sauces, or dairy products. These will attract pests and will not decompose properly
- Add weeds that have mature seed heads. These seeds will not break down, and you will end up adding them to your garden when you go to use your compost!
- Put your compost in a full-sun location as it will dry out quickly
- Add lots of nitrogen rich products without balancing out the carbon

