



Composting 101

Compost Troubleshooting Guide

The compost pile is a thriving little world or ecosystem in which a wide array of microorganisms develop and multiply. In the process, these microorganisms convert waste into useful humus-like organic matter. But like most ecosystems, a number of factors can alter the environment within the compost world causing problems that ultimately make managing the compost a less successful effort.

The following page contains a troubleshooting guide that offers suggestions for correcting some of the problems that might occur in your compost pile.

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PROBLEM	CAUSE	SOLUTION
Bad odor (rotten smell)	Too much moisture.	Turn the compost or add dry, porous material like straw.
Bad odor (ammonia smell)	Too much nitrogen compared to carbon.	Add high-carbon materials like straw, sawdust, wood chips, or dry leaves.
	Compacted leaves.	Turn the compost or make the pile smaller.
	Inadequate air.	Turn the compost.
Low compost	Pile too small.	Increase size, insulate sides.
	Too little moisture.	Add water and turn the compost.
	Too much moisture.	Turn the compost and mix in dry materials.
	Too little air.	Turn the compost.
	Lack of nitrogen.	Mix in nitrogen source like grass clippings, manure, or
	Cold weather.	Increase pile size or insulate pile with a layer of straw or
	Particle size too large.	Chip or grind materials.
	Pile is dry throughout	Not enough water; too much wood
Compost pile is damp and warm in middle but nowhere else	Pile is too small.	Collect more material and mix the old ingredients into a new pile, then moisten.
Pest infestation — dogs, rodents, insects	Improper food scraps added.	Don't add meat, fats, bones or other animal products.
	Food scraps not covered.	Place fruit and vegetable scraps in the center of pile, cover with soil. Use rodent-
Neighbor complains	Compost pile is ugly.	Cover with pretty bedspread or throw flowers on it.