

COMPOSTING IN WEST TEXAS

Permian Basin

Master Gardeners



In the desert we learn to live with high winds, intense sun, low humidity and drought and they all contribute to evaporation in our composting attempts. The decomposition in composting requires about 50% moisture and adequate airflow during the whole aerobic composting process. All the new techniques are directed at decreasing evaporation while managing the airflow. The old rules have been tweaked to better ensure success in West Texas. These rules apply to a hot compost pile.

First use a 3' x 3' bin with almost solid sides so that you can better manage the airflow to decrease evaporation. If you already have a bin with too much air flow, **line the inside with a plastic material or cardboard**, leaving about a one inch air space at the bottom of the bin. **Air intake from the bottom of the pile is best to promote the pile's greatest decomposition.**

Begin by bulking 6-8" of twigs, logs or mulch on the bottom of the pile directly on the soil. These materials decompose slowly so they maintain air space. They also resist compression from the weight of materials.

Pre-soak any dry organic material before adding it. For example, dry leaves will absorb water if soaked in a pail or wheelbarrow before adding them. Remember, the smaller

the piece the faster it will compost.

If at all possible it is best to compost in maximum shade.

The bin must be placed on soil, not concrete or asphalt as they heat up and increase the evaporation of the pile.

Begin by alternating approx. 6" layers of green and brown materials in the bin.*

A cover should be placed directly onto the materials in the bin to decrease loss of moisture as air passes upward through the pile. This step also decreases insects. Use newspaper, plastic, cardboard, rug, tarp, straw or dry leaves.

Since your compost materials will not always reach the top of the bin, **a second cover (such as a tarp or carpet) should be draped over the entire bin itself.**

Add water as necessary - probably two to three times per week. Yours may vary depending on the wind and the location of your pile, and you should adjust accordingly.

Your compost pile should be turned and mixed as necessary. Every week to two weeks should be sufficient.

Remember: NO MEAT, DAIRY PRODUCTS OR PET WASTE.

***What can I compost?**
Anything that was once a plant can be composted.

Carbon-Rich
(Brown and dry)

Straw

Pine needles

Small branches

Dryer lint

Dry grass clippings

Dried plant materials

(trimmings, leaves, vines)

Sawdust

Shredded newspaper

Nitrogen-Rich
(Green and moist)

Wet grass trimmings

Fresh plant clippings

Vegetable and fruit wastes

Barnyard manures and beddings

Alfalfa pellets

Tea bags

Coffee grounds and filters

Hair, fur, feathers