



# COMPOSTING BASICS

There are four basic ingredients required for composting: GREENS, BROWNS, WATER, & AIR. Mixing the proper amounts of these ingredients together will provide the composting organisms (see Compost Critters) with enough nitrogen, carbon, moisture and oxygen to break down the materials efficiently.

## GREENS + BROWNS + WATER + AIR

**GREENS** are fresh organic materials that serve as sources of nitrogen. Greens are the primary energy source of the active microorganisms, and are useful as a supplementary source of moisture in the pile.

**BROWNS** are dried or dead organic materials that serve as sources of carbon. Browns are useful for retaining moisture, creating small air pockets, and supporting a more diverse community of decomposers in the pile.

**WATER** helps ensure efficient processing of organics. Ideally, the pile is kept as moist as a wrung out sponge. Too little moisture will inhibit decomposition, but too much water can produce smelly, anaerobic conditions.

**AIR** is essential for a sweet, earthy-smelling compost pile. Turning your compost pile regularly will help to inhibit the growth of odor-causing anaerobic bacteria, and will result in faster decomposition.

### WHAT GOES IN THE COMPOST PILE?

#### 50% GREENS

Fresh yard trimmings, fresh grass clippings, fresh or moldy fruit and vegetable scraps, coffee grinds, tea leaves, breads, certain types of manure\*



#### 50% BROWNS

Woody materials, dead or dried yard debris, chopped branches and twigs, bark, straw, sawdust, coffee filters, tea bags, shredded paper and paper products

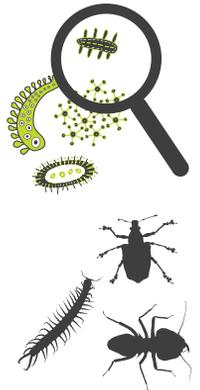
\*For more information on composting with manure, visit [solanacenter.org/ciy](http://solanacenter.org/ciy)

### COMPOST CRITTERS

A handful of compost contains more decomposer organisms than there are people on the planet. These amazing little creatures are responsible for making the whole composting process happen.

**MICROORGANISMS** (like bacteria and fungi) do the majority of decomposition work. Although too small to see, they are on everything you throw into the compost pile.

**MACROORGANISMS** (like insects, worms, and grubs) are large enough to see. They usually enter the compost pile from the surrounding landscape in the later stages of decomposition.



### WHAT STAYS OUT OF THE COMPOST PILE?

Meat, fish, poultry & bones

Eggs & dairy products

Charcoal or firelog ashes

Treated wood products

Dog, cat & human feces

Glossy/coated paper

Oils, grease & lard

Inorganic materials

Fresh weeds with mature seeds

(unless building a hot compost pile)