



THE COMPOSTING CONTINUUM

Composting occurs on a spectrum; once you have the four ingredients, it is the amount of attention that you pay to the pile that determines its level of activity and how quickly it will yield finished compost.

MORE PASSIVE

Slower Decomposition

MORE ACTIVE

Faster Decomposition

COOL COMPOSTING

MATERIALS

Bury food scraps in the core of pile to deter pests. Do not add weed seeds or diseased plants. You can start the process with any volume of compostables.

MAINTENANCE

Turning and adding water to the pile are done at your leisure, remembering more aeration and moisture increase efficiency. The temperature of your pile may be 80°F or cooler.

BIOLOGY

There will be no heat-loving bacteria present, and your pile will host a diverse community of macroorganisms. You may even notice some seeds sprouting in the pile.

TIMELINE

Stop adding material several months before you plan to harvest. Expect finished compost in 6-18 months, correlated to your time and labor investments in the pile.

ACTIVE COMPOSTING

MATERIALS

Bury food scraps in the core of pile to deter pests. Do not add weed seeds or diseased plants. Starting with a bulk of material will speed up heating, but is not necessary.

MAINTENANCE

Turning should be done with some regularity (approx. once or twice a month), water as needed to ensure even dampness. An efficient active pile operates between 80°F- 130°F.

BIOLOGY

As pile temperature rises, populations of heat -loving microorganisms will grow. As the pile cools, you will notice more macroorganisms and possibly some seed sprouts.

TIMELINE

Stop adding material 2-3 months before you plan to harvest. Expect finished compost in 5-6 months, correlated to your time and labor investments in the pile.

HOT COMPOSTING

MATERIALS

Weed seeds will be deactivated by even heat distribution throughout the pile. Starting with a large volume of material (try filling the bin) helps ensure a rapid temperature spike.

MAINTENANCE

Routine turning and watering (approx. once a week). A pile is considered 'hot' at 130°F and above. As the pile cools after a few days, aerate and add water to re-spike the temperature.

BIOLOGY





Hot piles are dominated by hard-working but short-lived communities of heat-loving bacteria. You will not see macroorganisms in the pile until it reaches a cooler phase.

TIMELINE

You will add almost all of your materials at the initial set-up of the bin. Expect finished compost in 3-4 months.

For more information on hot composting, visit www.solanacenter.org/ciy

EFFICIENCY TIPS ACROSS THE SPECTRUM

-  **LOCATION** Placing your bin on soil allows critical decomposers to more easily enter the pile. A shady location for the bin helps to conserve water, as pile contents won't dry out as rapidly.
-  **MIX IT UP** A greater diversity of inputs will produce a greater diversity of nutrients in the finished product. Don't be afraid to experiment with unconventional compostables!
-  **CHOP IT UP** Smaller particle size increases surface area of materials, and encourages faster decomposition. This is especially useful for breaking down woody, fibrous, and other resistant materials.
-  **"CAP" IT** Keeping a layer of browns (like pine needles, burlap, straw or cardboard) on top of the pile helps seal in moisture and deters pests like fruit flies and rodents from accessing food scraps.