

BACKYARD COMPOST GUIDE

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What to Put in a Compost Pile

A healthy compost pile includes similar amounts of nitrogen-rich material (Greens) and carbon-rich materials (Browns). Here is a small list of ingredients for your pile, and what not to include.

GREENS



BROWNS



AVOID



COMPOST
TIP:**

Smaller pieces compost quicker. (i.e. sawdust will decompose quicker than a tree branch.)

How Hot's Your Pile?™

THE STEADY ZONE **80-100°F (27-38°C)**

The collaboration of bugs, worms, and microorganisms are slowly breaking down the rich organic material in the pile. Small compost piles will remain in the Steady Zone until they run out of fuel or become too dry. If the inner pile temperature falls to within a few degrees of the ambient air temperature, you may need to add fuel, water, or turn the pile. If the material is dark brown and smells “earthy” then the compost is done.

THE ACTIVE ZONE **100-130°F (38-54°C)**

For most backyard piles this should be the zone that you try to keep your pile in for the quickest composting. In this temperature range, mostly all of the composting occurs as microorganisms break down the material. Most insects and worms cannot withstand the heat of the pile. If your pile peaks into the Active Zone, then falls back into the Steady Zone, it is time to turn your pile. Move the material from the outside of the pile to the inside to encourage further decomposition. The inside of the pile should be moderately damp. Keep in mind the hotter your pile is the more moisture it will lose. If you find dry spots while turning, add some water.

THE HOT ZONE **130-160°F (54-71°C)**

Congratulations! You are the envy of backyard composters everywhere! Only large piles (4 ft. x 4 ft. and larger) can obtain such high temperatures with nitrogen-rich materials such as grass clippings. In this zone the organic material is breaking down at a rapid rate as tiny microorganisms consume it.



If the temperature climbs above 160°F (71°C) then split the pile in half and water it down. Temperatures above this zone can kill the microorganisms and there is the (rare) chance of the pile catching on fire.

Frequently Asked Questions



Can this thermometer be left in the compost pile?

Yes, the thermometer is sealed and can be left in the compost pile.

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Where should I measure the temperature in my compost pile?

Around the center of the pile is a good place to test. The hottest part of the pile is generally the center.

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What should finished compost look like?

It should be dark, crumble easily and have an earthy smell. You should not be able to identify any of the original ingredients.

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What can I do with finished compost?

Compost can be used for gardening and landscaping around your home. Add it to your soil to help it retain nutrients and water.

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Does it measure the temperature at the tip of the probe or does the whole stem need to be in the compost pile?

The sensitive portion is the last 2 inches at the tip of the probe. So you don't have to necessarily put the entire stem into the compost pile.

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Is it OK to use this thermometer in a compost tumbler?

Yes, many customers use it for their compost tumblers. Just remember to remove it before tumbling!

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Customer Service: 858-225-1889