

COMMON COMPOSTING PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

Problem	Symptom	Immediate Remedy	Long-Term Remedies
Material is not decomposing.	Material is moist and dense but not wet.	Fluff pile with a pitchfork.	Aerate pile routinely.
Pile is saturated with water.	Material is wet, smelly, matted and may be oozing.	Turn pile and add dry brown material such as straw, sawdust, and pine needles.	Cover pile to prevent excess rain or run-off from soaking the pile. Aerate routinely.
Fall leaves are not breaking down.	Material is dry to touch. Very little life active in pile.	Add greens such as kitchen scraps or lawn clippings. Soak pile, turning and soaking until moist all through.	Maintain an ideal carbon to nitrogen ratio.
The compost caught on fire.	Smoke visible in the compost, charred center of the pile.	Moisten pile with water and mix in more browns to balance.	Maintain an ideal carbon to nitrogen ratio. Avoid excess nitrogen. Turn frequently.
Compost lacks life.	When turned with a pitchfork the exposed compost is devoid of life.	Assess moisture content and C:N ratio. Jumpstart by adding an amount of compost from an established pile.	"Add fresh horse manure (a source of red wigglers) to help population growth. If unavailable, add fresh cow or pig manures.
The sticks are not breaking down.	No evidence that the woody material is breaking down.	Remove large wood chunks.	Only add woody materials in small amounts and pieces.