

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT COMPOSTING

PROBLEM	CAUSE	SOLUTION
My pile has a bad odor	Improper food scraps, NO meat, dairy Anaerobic pile-not enough oxygen Too much grass	No meat, dairy scraps; bury appropriate kitchen scraps at least 1' deep in center of pile, turn pile. Add coarse material to bottom of pile for better air circulation. Add more carbon rich materials or remove some grass clipping to achieve appropriate ratio of components
Smells like rotten eggs	Not enough air, not enough browns	Aerate, add more browns
Smells like ammonia	Not enough browns	Mix in dry brown materials
Insect Pests	Pile is too dry or not mixed properly Insects may not be pests but beneficial to composting process	Turn pile Make sure food is buried properly Worms, isopods, millipedes, centipedes and ants decompose raw materials
Animal Pests	Improper food handling Pile is too close to bird feeder that attracts rodents	If rats and other rodents are a problem don't use food scraps or try burying them deeper in the center of the pile (1 foot) Stop feeding birds or move pile to another area
Pile Not Breaking Down	Not enough nitrogen Material not shredded enough Not wet enough	Add grass, kitchen scraps, manure (green component) Shred, break up material if possible Add water-should feel like wet sponge
Pile Not Breaking Down	Too dry	Add water and turn (Texture should be spongy)
Pile Not Breaking Down	Poor air circulation	Mix materials more frequently Check base and add more twigs, coarse material
Pile heats up but then stops	Poor aeration	Hot piles need more oxygen so turn the pile when it starts to cool down and add more nitrogen (green component)
Center of pile not warm enough	Pile is too small	Piles need a certain critical mass (18-20 cubic feet) to work well. Add more materials if possible, or use a smaller bin to concentrate volume of pile
Pile is too hot	Needs to be turned more frequently	Turn pile more frequently

Information taken from: VCE MG publication '[Home Composting](#)' by Master Gardeners Mary Jane Ross and Sue Williams 2005 and DEPA, Montgomery County Maryland '[Just the Facts About...Home Composting](#)' Lawn & Landscaping Information Series'