



## Barrington Community Garden Composting Guidelines

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Composting is a natural form of recycling, in which plant matter exposed to air, water, and Insects, bacteria, fungi, and other microorganisms (a.k.a. “bugs”) decomposes into a soil-like material called compost and generates heat. Compost is a great soil textural amendment and provides nutrients and minerals. The essential components of compost are:

**Carbon and nitrogen (in the right ratio).** Carbon and nitrogen are the two fundamental elements in composting. Carbon comes from dried or dead plant material (“browns”) and is used by “bugs” as an energy source. Nitrogen comes from fresh plant material (“greens”) and is used by “bugs” for protein synthesis (needed for growth and reproduction). While plant materials vary in their content of carbon and nitrogen, a general rule of thumb is to combine 3 parts browns and 1 part greens (by volume).

**Air.** Decomposing plant material uses up oxygen, so oxygen must be replaced to support further composting. Aeration through mixing of the compost replaces oxygen. A compost pile that is not properly aerated will become “anaerobic”, slimy, and generate unpleasant ammonia smells.

**Water.** “Bugs” use nutrients when they are dissolved in water. Too little water will suppress microbial activity and too much water will replace oxygen, resulting in an anaerobic compost pile. Optimally, compost should have a moisture content of 40 to 60 percent, or like a well-wrung sponge.

**Bugs.** Insects, bacteria, fungi, and other microorganisms already exist on most plant matter or will naturally find their way into the compost pile. Feed them and they will come.

**Adequate size.** A good minimum size for a compost pile is 3 feet wide by 3 feet deep x 3 feet high. Compost piles smaller than this aren’t able to hold in the heat to facilitate decomposition; too much larger and the pile becomes difficult to aerate.

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***Rule of Thumb: Compost = Air + Water + 3 Parts Browns + 1 Part Greens  
 (“bugs” are free)***

***“Browns”***

*Dried leaves*

*Straw/salt marsh hay/dried grass*

*Uncolored paper/cardboard*

*Wood chips/sawdust*

***“Greens”***

*Fresh plants and leaves*

*Fresh (green) grass clippings*

*Animal manure*

*Vegetable waste*

***Things NOT to compost at the BCG***

*General trash (paper cups, plastic, metal)*

*Diseased plants*

*Seeds in any form (e.g., on weeds, in vegetables, in hay)*

*Meat, fish, or dairy*

*Food scraps from home*

***When you add to the compost pile, also aerate and add water (if needed)***