



Barrington Community Garden Composting Guidelines

Composting is a natural form of recycling, in which plant matter exposed to air, water, 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. When creating compost, essential components 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 brown material and 1 part green material (by volume).

Air. Decomposing plant material uses up oxygen, so oxygen must be replaced to support further composting. Aeration, or turning the compost over with a pitchfork or shovel, replaces oxygen. A compost pile that is not properly aerated will become anaerobic (oxygen-poor), slimy, and smelly.

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 by 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.

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

“Browns”

Dried leaves

Straw/salt marsh hay/dried grass

Uncolored, non-glossy paper/cardboard

Wood chips/sawdust

“Greens”

Fresh plants and leaves

Fresh (green) grass clippings

Animal manure

Seedless vegetable waste

Things NOT to compost at the BCG

General trash (paper cups, plastic, metal)

Woody plant stalks (such as sunflower stalks)

Diseased plants (!)

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

Meat, fish, or dairy

Food scraps from home

Every time you add anything to the compost pile, also add water!