

# Backyard Composting Notes & Reference Guide

**Remember!**  
Cut all scraps small.  
2-3 in. square the  
largest. The smaller  
the better for  
your pile.

## What can be composted?

### Greens (WET)

- all food scraps:  
animal protein, dairy,  
vegetables, fruits, etc.
- egg shells
- grass clippings  
(green when wet/  
brown when dry)

The system is designed to compost all food scraps including animal protein and dairy. The most persistent myth is meat and dairy can not be composted. In fact, high protein food scraps increase the pile temperature. More high protein food scraps are more fuel for bacteria.

#### Compost too dry?

Add more greens and mix.  
You will not ever need to add  
water to a compost pile!

#### Compost too wet?

Add more browns  
and mix.

### Browns (DRY)

- leaves, primarily
- coffee grinds and tea bags  
(natural fiber bags, not plastic ones)
- dried flowers
- seafood shells
- hair, animal and human
- dryer lint, natural fiber cloth ONLY
- peanut shells
- dried flowers
- straw, cut small
- shredded newspaper
- egg cartons, finely shredded
- sawdust from untreated wood
- wood chips and shavings, from  
untreated wood

The brown to green ratio is generally 3:1 but this ratio will vary throughout the life of a compost pile and the seasons. External temperature, humidity, particle size, moisture content of the food scraps you add, mixing frequency and vigor are all factors. Shredded leaves contribute to a hotter pile because they provide more surface area for bacteria to thrive. Shredded leaves take up 1/3 the amount of space whole leaves do.

## LEAVES

### Leaves are the fuel of the composting process.

Always have a ready supply of dry leaves available.  
In the fall gather as many dry leaves as you can. Use  
the past year as a guide as to how many you'll need.

### Need more leaves? Visit The Wood Lot!

The Wood Lot offers leaves and wood chips to all  
Providence residents free. 45 Salem Street,  
Providence. 9 am-3 pm, Saturdays  
[thewoodlot.shop](http://thewoodlot.shop)

## Maintaining a Healthy Compost

### Mix, Mix, Mix!

More than anything, backyard composting is an aerobic process. It needs free oxygen to thrive. Mixing needs to be a regular part of your routine. Mixing keeps bacterial action up and odors down by preventing anaerobic/volatile liquids and gasses from forming. Compost piles with a high moisture content that don't get mixed are at risk of turning anaerobic. Anaerobic smells attract animals.

### Natural Compost Activators

- alfalfa meal
- blood meal
- bone meal
- soil and spent potting soil
- finished compost
- protein meals  
(dog and cat food)
- muck  
(black soil dug from swamps)
- mammalian urine  
(high in nitrogen)

### What to look for

Heat and moisture buildup on the inside of the composter are signs the process is happening. Mixing helps keep this process active. Your pile will not always be hot. This is normal. Piles regularly go through wide temperature swings depending on inputs, aeration, and the seasons. The more attention given, the better your compost will be. Active composting occurs down to 35-40 degrees, albeit much slower.

### Recognizing the finished product

- Start by thinking about what commercial/bagged  
compost looks, feels and smells like. When nothing  
in your home pile except perhaps small pieces of  
egg shells or leaf fragments are recognizable and  
all heat is gone, you know the compost is either  
ready to use or very close. The compost will be  
dark, slightly moist and crumbly and a wee bit  
spongy to a squeeze. At this point most worms and  
bugs (micro and macro) will have gone somewhere  
else for food.

### Throughout the seasons

During the winter your pile may freeze if not enough inputs are added and mixed. If so, keep adding and layering leaves and food scraps to either your leaf bin or your current composter and keep layering until a thaw. Then mix. Vigorously. When freezing temperatures are past for

the season, commence your normal composting process. Use the leaf bin you've been adding food scraps to all winter to feed your current spring pile. Because this material has been partially broken down all winter your spring composting may be quicker.

### Questions? I'm here for you!

Stewart Martin | 401.480.4431  
[providencegardenworks.com](http://providencegardenworks.com)  
[stewartmartin@mac.com](mailto:stewartmartin@mac.com)



### Deterring Animals

Many animals use their pee to define a route to a food source. If you detect unwanted activity around your composter, spray this mixture around periphery. It destroys the scent trail they established. This is also a DARN GOOD relatively natural weed killer.

- 1 gallon horticultural vinegar
- 1 cup salt
- 1-2 squirts of mild, non-commercial dish soap
- Shake & spray!



If your composter is filled to capacity, consider using this as a good storage vessel for compost curing. You can make this from a plastic bin as well.