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Agriculture & Natural Resources

COOPERATIVE EXTENSION • YOLO COUNTY

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COMPOSTING

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Turn kitchen scraps and garden trimmings into a rich organic matter known as compost. Packed with vital nutrients, compost is made by decomposing usable waste in a pile or bin, and then incorporating the finished product into the soil to improve its organic content.

Choosing a Spot Available water and enough space for temporary storage of organic materials are all helpful. Do not place your pile next to a wooden fence or building, because the wood will rot over time.

Building a Compost Bin Compost bins can be constructed from new or salvaged building material, chicken wire, wooden pallets, cement blocks, or plastic. For example, a garbage can with holes poked in it makes a compact and manageable container. Whatever you use, be sure to build open slats or poke air holes to allow oxygen to enter and speed up decomposition. Improvise a lightweight compost container by using large garbage bags. Poke about twenty holes in it with scissors, fill it with material, add water until material squeezes out like a wet sponge and then tie off at the top. Shake or turn occasionally to mix. Leave the bag in the sun to speed up decomposition.



Choosing Composting Material There are four basic ingredients for composting: nitrogen, carbon, water and air. Composting is a lot like cooking. The easiest compost recipe calls for blending roughly equal parts of green or wet material (which is rich in nitrogen) and brown or dry material (which is high in carbon). Simply layer or mix these materials in a pile or enclosure. Chop or shred large pieces to 12 inches or less. Add water and fluff to add air and then leave it to the microorganisms to do the rest.

Some ideas for green material: manure from plant-eating animals, grass clippings, garden waste, and food scraps.

Some ideas for brown material: dry leaves, straw, wood shavings, pine needles, small twigs, and dry grass clippings.

Tips – To check for moisture, pick up a handful and squeeze it. If a few drops of water come out, it is fine. In dry, hot weather, you will need to add water more often. You can add water as you turn the pile. If the pile is too wet, the beneficial organisms die and the compost gives off a bad odor. Turn the pile and add some brown material to correct this. A good compost pile will heat up to 120 to 140 degrees Fahrenheit. The composting process is complete when the compost does not heat up any more, it has a uniform brown color, and it has a pleasant earthy aroma.

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