



Treading Lightly Inc.

Composting Troubleshooting Guide

WHAT IS COMPOST?	GREENS are high in N or protein	BROWNS – C are carbohydrate-rich providing food sources for the hard-working microbes
Air Co2 + Water H2O + Carbon C + Nitrogen N • For efficient decomposition, we need the right ratio of C to N, or 'greens' and 'browns'. • A ratio of about 60% green material to 40% brown material is ideal, but not essential.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • food scraps • coffee grounds, tea bags • grass clippings, fresh leaves • animal manure (except cat & dog) • seaweed • hair, fur 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • paper (newspaper, plates, napkins) • cardboard (not glossy/waxy), moistened • dried leaves, twigs • straw, hay, mulch, vetiver grass • sawdust, wood ash • eggshells, crushed

SYMPTOM	PROBLEM EXPLAINED	SOLUTIONS
ODOUR		
Rotten smell	A compost pile that smells like rotten eggs or rotting vegetables has gone anaerobic (not enough oxygen to support aerobic microbes and the anaerobic ones have taken over). Unfortunately, they produce hydrogen sulfide as a by-product (smells like rotten eggs).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turn the material. • Cover with more browns until there is no visible food waste. • Add used coffee grounds. • In future, add less meat, greasy food, dairy.
Ammonia smell	Compost piles smell like ammonia when they give off excess nitrogen (N) in the form of ammonia (NH3). The smell signals that the pile has a surplus of nitrogen from too many green materials.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turn the material or even spread it out to allow the excess ammonia to vaporize. • Add brown material to restore the carbon-nitrogen balance. • In future, add less nitrogen.
MOISTURE LEVELS		
Too Wet	Dense or water-logged compost piles don't contain enough oxygen for the microorganisms to survive. Often these piles give off an unpleasant odour. The solution is to aerate the pile and add more dry materials.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turn the material. • Add more browns. • In future, avoid adding liquidy or soupy foods • Cover in the rain; uncover in sunshine. • Reassess your site and check for water from an overhanging building.
Too Dry	Mulch and other browns often absorb moisture slowly and need to be moist (Not sopping wet, just thoroughly damp like a wrung-out sponge).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turn the material. • Add more water. • Add water, turn and let it soak in. Repeat several times. • Uncover in the rain; cover in sunshine.
PESTS		
Flies	Flies need a damp environment; their presence sometimes indicates a pile that's gotten too wet. Flies feed on damp, decaying organic matter so avoid leaving exposed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bury all food deep in the pile (don't dump fruit on top where the flies can easily find it). • Kitchen waste of all kinds can be wrapped in newspaper and then buried deeply in the pile, adding an obstacle between the flies and the garbage.
Rodents	Rodents seek shelter and food. Do you see evidence of burrowing into the top, or droppings? Is something trying to dig under the bin? Rats like dry places, so keep the contents of the compost bin damp. Rats don't like disturbance, so turn your pile the best you can. They can chew through plastic to get to their food source, making many commercial vulnerable to an infestation.	<p>General Tips:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid adding cooked food, meat, fats, fish or bones. These foods produce strong odours while decomposing and attract pests to feed. • Add browns, ensure lid is replaced properly, cover with a tarp • Bury fresh food deep into the compost and cover with finished compost • Plant mint near the composter (rodents hate the smell). <p>Location:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise off the ground - discourage burrowers from accessing. • Locate away from walls or fences that offer them good hiding spots and security (rodents often feel safer near fixed walls and fences). • Cut tall grass etc near compost to discourage rodent habitation. <p>Rodent-proof your set-up</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cover base/sides of the set-up with chicken wire/mesh.
OTHER		
Finished harvest (compost) is too coarse	Some materials, such as eggshells and corncobs, take a long time to break down.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you want finely textured compost, shred or chop the materials before putting them into the bin. • Sift out large chunks and throw them back into the next pile.