



the local
carbon
network

Urban Farming - Lesson 8 Starting to Compost

What do you eat?

To be able to compost successfully you need to eat fresh fruit and vegetables daily so you can collect the peels and scraps. You can also collect coffee grounds, vegetarian leftovers and stale bread.

If you eat meat keep the bones in the freezer and burn them once a month on a barbecue before adding to the pile. They are a source of phosphorus.



Add scraps to the pile once a day

Collect the scraps throughout the day in a container on your kitchen counter, then add them to your compost pile in the evening or the following morning. Even on the hottest days the scraps can sit for 12-24 hours without smelling or attracting insects, and you will avoid making trips to your compost pile unnecessarily..



Starting off

In the beginning you will have a very small amount of food scraps, that is okay, the temperature will pick up after a few days.

When you start a fresh batch always leave a couple of pints of ready compost in the box so you will inoculate with microorganisms



Compost recipe

Compost is made primarily of greens (veggie scraps) and browns (dry leaves, paper strips or sawdust)

Your ratio is one part green to one part brown until the box is half full and then you can start adding only greens until the box is full.



Humidity

You will want to wet the sawdust. You want it damp but not soaking wet. Like a sponge that you have wrung out. A good ratio is about half its volume in water, so 2 pints of sawdust will absorb 1 pint of water.

Stir lightly with your hand or a small spade to ensure absorption



Biochar

Add a little biochar to the mixture. You will want 10% of the volume, so if you have a 15 gallon box you will want 1.5 gallon in the mix by the end. The best way to do this is prepare 1.5 gallons of biochar in a pail with water and then add a little each day until it's finished. It is fine if you have finished adding the biochar by the time you box is half full.



Managing the Biochar

No need to clean the scoop after each use as this is time consuming. Just keep it in a clean container near the biochar.



Mixing

Give everything a thorough mix and pile to one side before closing the box.

If the material was piled on the left hand side of the box, pile it to the right hand side. Pile small amounts on the short sides and as the material increase start piling on the long sides.



Temperature

Use a compost thermometer to keep temperatures in check. The temps should start increasing when you have a gallon of material at least. Then they will have a few really hot days (140-160F) and then start cooling, but still peaking again every time you add your greens



Tumbler or Thermal Box?

They both work and it just depends on personal choice. The tumbler is more expensive but you don't hand turn the compost. The box takes up less space.



Note: if you get a thermal box you will need to cut 2 breathing holes under the handles.



Maturing your compost

Temperature: stays between 90 - 160F

Humidity: is damp but never soaking with water

Insects: should not be present (sometimes fruit flies only)

Odour: Slight smell only the first week - never a revolting smell



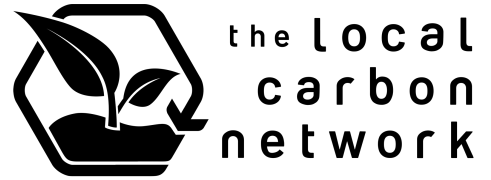
Use

Can be used directly for growing your seedlings or pot plants/veggies

Compost is mature for field application after about 8 weeks when it reaches room temperature.

For use in pots a further 4 - 6 months of curing are necessary.





The next lesson explains the basics of working with the weather...

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or keep an eye out for our newsletter as we often arrange free online Q&A sessions on ZOOM

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Thanks!