

# Tips to Help Speed Up the Composting Process

- **Compost Piles Need to be Fed the Right Ratio of Carbon to Nitrogen (aka Browns to Greens):** Browns are materials like dried leaves and grass, straw, twigs, and wood chips/shavings. Greens are materials like kitchen scraps and fresh grass. A 50% browns, 50% greens pile is a good place to start. If you find the pile gets stinky or too wet, add more browns and stir. Leaves raked in the fall can be kept beside the compost pile to add brown material.
  - **In the Kitchen:** Empty your kitchen compost bucket a few times a week to prevent smells and fruit flies in the house. You can line the kitchen bucket with a layer of newsprint which keeps food scraps from sticking to the bottom, the newsprint can be tossed into the compost heap with the food scraps. You can also add a layer of pelleted horse bedding to the bucket which will absorb any moisture that leaks from the kitchen scraps; adding about 1/5th the volume of the bucket in pellets will also create a good browns to greens ratio (Figure 1. inset photo).
- **Compost Piles Need Moisture:** If you grab a handful of compost and squeeze it, there should be some moisture left on your hand, but it should not be dripping wet. If the pile is too dry, add water. If the pile is too wet, add browns.
- **Compost Piles Need to be the Right Temperature:** Breaking down compost involves a number of different organisms working together. When you have the right ratio of browns to greens, as well as the right amount of moisture, it creates an environment where a team of microbes will break down the pile quickly. These microbes create heat while they work. To tell if they are working you can either invest in a compost thermometer or use a metal pipe. The ideal temperature is between 45°C and 71°C. To use the pipe method insert a cool metal pipe into the centre of the pile, wait a minute, then pull it out it; if the pipe is warm to the touch then the microbes in the pile are working. If the pipe isn't warm try mixing the pile, adding moisture, and possibly adding more green material if it has been awhile since green material was added. Check the temperature again in a couple days.



Figure 1. Compost pile using 3 wood pallets, yielding a pile approximately 1 m square. Inset photo is a kitchen compost bucket lined with newsprint and a layer of pelleted horse bedding to absorb any moisture that leaks from kitchen scraps.

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- **Compost Piles Need to Breathe:** Composting is an aerobic process which means it needs oxygen to work. This can be accomplished by stirring or turning the pile periodically. For the fastest results a weekly (or more) stir is needed. You can also create a no-stir pile that still works quickly by starting the pile on a meshed bottom or on a pile of branches that let air move beneath the pile, and include air tubes throughout the pile. Air tubes can be made by rolling mesh wire into a tube 5 to 10 cm in diameter or by using perforated pipe and then placing the tubes in the pile either vertically or horizontally; the more you include, the faster the pile should break down (Figure 2). Tumbler compost bins should be rolled to introduce air into the material a few times a week for best results.
- **Compost Pile Size and the Size of Materials Matter:** A compost pile 1 meter square (1 m deep x 1 m wide x 1 m high) is ideal to manage in a backyard; this size also allows adequate heat build up, moisture retention, and ease of mixing.
  - Green and brown material that is broken down into smaller sizes will decompose faster. For example, a whole pumpkin and a bag of leaves will eventually break down, but a pumpkin broken into pieces and mixed with leaves that have been run through a lawn mower will break down much faster.
- **Composting Help:** Learning to compost efficiently may require a little homework. Ask questions to experienced composters: gardeners, horticultural societies, and ecology clubs. We can help point you in the right direction as well, contact us (705) 652-8392 or [info@dourodummer.on.ca](mailto:info@dourodummer.on.ca)

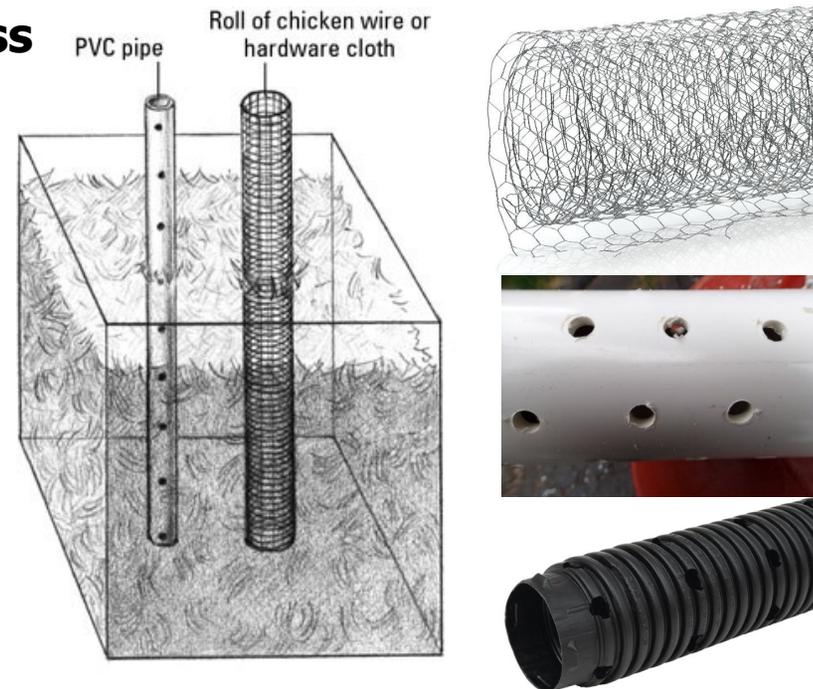


Figure 2. Rolled mesh or perforated pipes can be placed in the pile vertically or horizontally to increase air flow.

