

CHAPTER 7: COMPOSTING YOUR ORGANIC WASTE

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As the first law of thermodynamics, energy cannot be created or destroyed. Thus, it is important to recycle in order to effectively manage the circulation of organic energy. Recycling organic waste that can biodegrade results in a compost that can be later used in soil as a fertilizer. This chapter provides guidelines to effectively compost and maintain organic waste, a powerful tool to reduce waste and the use of chemical fertilizers, which are harmful for the ecosystem.

SELECTING A LOCATION

Every location has certain criteria that needs to be met for organic compost.

Indoor

If you do not have space for an outdoor compost, you can select an indoor bin.

Utilizing an Indoor Space

Indoor bins are an economical choice for apartment dwellers and can range in styles, sizes, and price. Select a small space that is easy-to-reach so that you are able to compost without any difficulties.



Finding an Indoor Space

It is useful to have one indoor compost that is stored in a small, easily accessible area, typically under the sink or nearby the garbage can in the kitchen. This keeps your location clean and makes it easy to maneuver to your compost. If you have small children, make sure your storage space is out of their reach so that it is less likely to create a mess.

Outdoor

Composting outside allows you to have a bigger container and area than an indoor space.

This section will discuss composting outside in a container with the following guidelines, as it is recommended for best practices by the Environmental Protection Agency (Newcomer):

- Select a dry, shady spot near a water source that is separate from the roots of trees or fast growing vines as they can steal the nutrients from your compost.
- Easy access to water allows the microbes inside your waste to heat and degrade.
- Your compost may attract pests, so keeping it a couple yards separate from your garden beds will prevent any damages to your garden.

SELECTING A CONTAINER

A container is essential to effectively recycle organic waste as it holds all of the compost material. Most compost containers are typically a bin, tumbler, or pail; this chapter will refer to all of these types as containers.

Indoor Containers

You need a container to store your compost indoors.

Building Your Own Container

When building your container, consider what the size and shape would look like. Most indoor containers are made of plastic boxes, metal containers, garbage bins, or regular buckets.

A container can be any size or shape that is customized to your taste, although it must have the following:

- Container covers for the compost process and to prevent odors.
- Breathing holes around the rim and at the bottom, due to which it must be placed on a tray.

Buying Your Container

As composts often attract flies and odors, consider thoroughly researching the container you want to buy so that it prevents this. Special compost bins are available in many hardware stores such as Home Depot or Lowe's.



Outdoor Containers

An outdoor container can help organize and compose your waste effectively by keeping the materials together.

Building Your Own Container

The composting process requires an outdoor container that is open on the bottom, closed from the top, and has air holes. Most containers that provide this are square or round. Wood framed compost bins are made by forming wood boards into a square or rectangle. Old trash cans can be used as round containers because of their lids and ability to roll on their side to air the compost.

Buying Your Container

Outdoor compost bins are available in many hardware stores such as Home Depot or Lowe's. These containers are usually large and expensive, with the exception of open wire bins available on Amazon at \$39.

MAINTAINING YOUR COMPOST

It takes anywhere from two to nine months of maintenance to compost completely. In addition to nitrogen and carbon, composts need water and air.

Layering Your Compost

Layering your materials in thin, even layers will help drain and air your compost. Figure 1 shows how to layer your compost to accomplish this.

Figure 1: Layering Ratios of Organic Compost

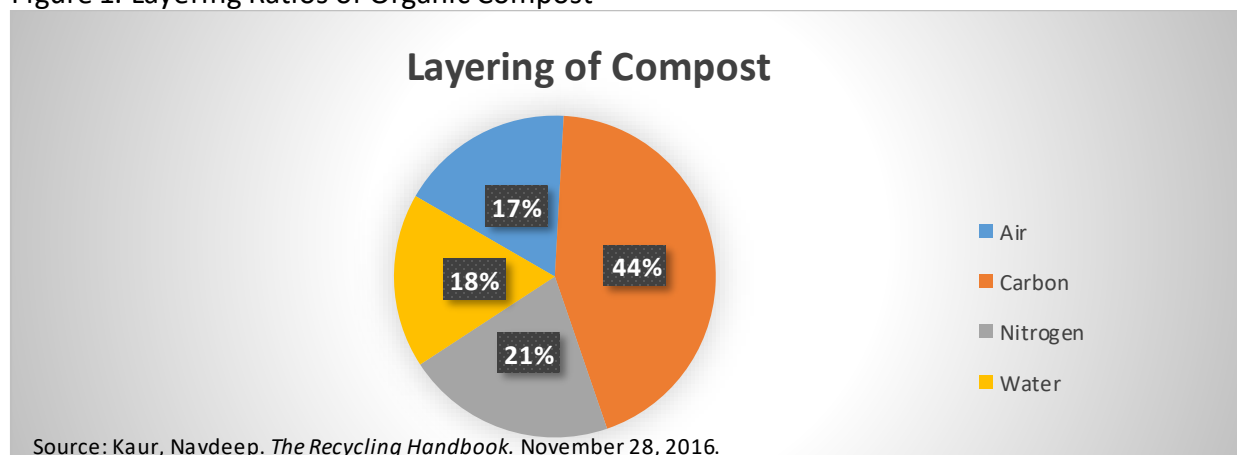


Figure 1: All organic compounds consist of carbon and nitrogen. The ideal carbon to nitrogen (C:N) ratio is 25-30:1. Nitrogen, often referred as "greens" in a compost, is derived from green organic matter such as grass clippings, kitchen waste, and coffee grounds. Carbon, often referred as "browns" in a compost, is derived from brown plant-based materials such as dead leaves, branches, twigs, newspaper, and unbleached brown napkins (Newcomer).

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