

SACG Compost Guidelines

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Compost is like cooking. Everyone has their own style but there are dos and don'ts that most of us would agree on. Because we often do our community work at different times and there are always questions about composting, I put together some simple guidelines. These are based on a little bit of research but mostly on my personal experience and opinion (I'm no expert). I also started a compost pile labeling system so anyone can walk up to the compost area and have some idea about how far along each pile is in the composting process and what needs to be done with them. Have fun y'all!

Basic Compost Pile Guidelines

- A. LAYER IT – (new piles and additions to existing #1 piles)
- When you start a new pile **begin with small brush** and large plants in the bottom layers; this helps keep the brush piles down and they'll break down instead of having to be sent to the landfill.
 - **Alternate layers** of fresh green stuff or manure with dry stuff (bagged leaves and grass clippings) and layer in a sprinkling of #2 or #3 compost to start the pile cooking. (**Always cover new additions of wet garbage or green stuff with leaves and/or dirt to discourage flies and retain heat and moisture.**)
 - **Level it.** As you build it, take each layer flat. This allows water to soak in and speeds up the composting.
 - **Water** each layer well as you build it. Dry leaves absorb a huge amount of moisture and will just sit there for months if they aren't thoroughly soaked.
 - When you start a pile, always leave room in the enclosure to turn it later.
- B. KEEP IT WET (all piles) – Set a sprinkler on low on a pile when you come to do your gardening. A compost pile can rot in as little as a month or as long as a year.
- C. STIR IT UP (all piles) – Drive a pitchfork repeatedly into the pile and pry up a little. Compost needs to breathe to keep cooking. A long stake or pole works too; just stick it into the pile as deeply as possible over and over.
- D. TURN IT – at least once or twice during the cooking process. This breaks up the clumps, evens out the moisture and speeds up the process. Keep the top level.

LABELING SYSTEM (signs in the piles)

- #1.** New pile, you can add to this one any time, just keep it level and cover up the green stuff; keep it moist.
- #2.** This pile has been turned once. **NO MORE NEW STUFF.** Keep it wet and stir it now and then; it is still cooking and should be hot in the middle.
- #3.** This pile has been turned and stirred and has finished cooking. It's ready to sift and use.
- Circular arrow = turn this pile.** When you see this sign, feel free to grab a fork and go to work.