How Does Composting Work?

1. We are the key to composting. We love to eat banana peels, rotten apples, brown wilted lettuce, fallen leaves, and weeds from your garden.

2. We need a balanced diet! We need carbon for energy and nitrogen to help build our bodies. Some of your wastes are high in carbon. These include
   - paper
   - sawdust
   - wood chips
   - straw
   - leaves.
   Other wastes are high in nitrogen. These include
   - food scraps
   - grass clippings
   - manure.

3. Don’t smother us! We need air to survive. If we don’t have air, the compost pile will turn smelly! Be sure your compost container has holes in it to allow air to get into the compost pile. If possible, stir or turn your compost pile every week or so to let in more air.

4. Don’t let us dry out! We need water. Your compost pile should be about as moist as a sponge that has just been wrung out.

5. Don’t let us get cold! We like temperatures of 90° to 140°F (32° to 60°C). If your compost pile is too small, we will feel the cold air coming in from the sides. The best way to keep us warm is to build a pile that is at least 3 feet x 3 feet x 3 feet (1 meter x 1 meter x 1 meter).

6. We must be able to get to our food! It is harder for us to eat large pieces of food than to eat small pieces of food.

7. If you supply all these things—food, air, and moisture in a good-sized pile—we will be glad to make compost for you.

Cornell Cooperative Extension
Helping You Put Knowledge to Work

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