



Common composting problems and their solutions

Symptom of problem	Cause of symptom	Solution
Rotten egg smell	Not enough oxygen due to compaction	Turn and mix pile to create air pockets. If particle size is too small (<1 inch), add bulkier particles such as woodchips about 2" in size.
	Excessive moisture (water drips from squeeze test)	Turn and mix pile to aid drying. If particle size is too small, add bulkier particles such as woodchips.
Ammonia smell	Excess nitrogen	Add more carbon sources (straw, leaves, etc). See composting basics video for more info.
Pile does not heat up	Pile too small	Increase pile size to at least 3 ft x 3 ft x 3 ft deep. In the winter it needs to be larger: at least 5 ft x 5 ft.
	Pile too dry – most common problem (use squeeze test to tell moisture content)	While turning and mixing pile, add water with a hose or bucket. Let pile rest for several hours, then retest with the squeeze test. Add more water if necessary.
	Not enough nitrogen	Add nitrogen sources (grass clippings, hay, etc.). See composting basics video for more info.
	Not enough oxygen	Turn and mix pile to introduce oxygen. If particles are too small, add bulkier items such as woodchips.
	Cold weather	Make sure the pile is large enough (at least 5 ft x 5 ft). Turn and mix pile less frequently than in warm weather.
	Composting is complete	Compost is complete when it resembles soil and is crumbly.
Attracts insects, millipedes, slugs, etc.	This is normal	To minimize insect problem, keep at the proper moisture level. Make sure the pile is heating to high enough temperatures to kill any eggs laid by the insects.