

Give Your Trees Some Composting Love

In the natural world, tree waste piles up on the forest floor and begins to decay. The rotting leaves and tree parts eventually decompose returning beneficial nutrients to the soil. This composting process is nature's most basic recycling program and can easily be replicated for your landscaped trees using only your yard and kitchen waste.

First, choose a convenient place in your yard for a compost site, a mixture of sun and shade works best as you want the ingredients to heat up but not dry out. Next, choose your preferred composting structure: a heap or pile, a wire hoop, a self made or commercially purchased composting bin, or simply a plastic bucket.



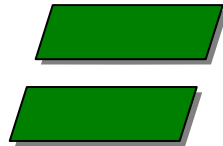
Composting bins come in all shapes and sizes. Like you compost mix, these bins can be as simple or as advanced as you want to make them.

Depending on your interest level, you can make home composting as simple or as scientific as you like. Either way, your compost recipe will always include these basic ingredients:

- Brown material: (carbon rich) leaves, untreated wood chips, straw, sawdust etc.
- Green material: (nitrogen rich) grass clippings, vegetable and fruit scraps
- Water
- Air

Layer your browns and greens. Start with 5-6 inches of browns on the bottom, and then add 2-3 inches of green. Add water to make the consistency moist, similar to a wrung-out sponge. Mix the pile bi-weekly to circulate air. Your attention to the pile, as well as keeping the ingredients proportioned with 2/3 brown and 1/3 greens, will determine how quickly the material will decompose. Also remember, the smaller you break-up the browns and greens, the faster decomposition will occur.

So how does this help your trees? After several months your ingredients will decompose into a dark, nutrient rich soil amendment. If you are planting new trees, mix 1-3 inches of compost into the soil under and around new trees before planting. To improve poor soil, mix 4-6 inches of the compost into your soil. Also, you can use your compost as part of your mulching regiment by spreading 2-3 inches around existing trees and shrubs which will help keep tree roots cool as well as help conserve water and prevent soil erosion.



Properly applied compost increases tree growth and vigor which will help to keep them around for many years to come.

For more information about composting or to purchase an Earth Machine composting bin (\$45), please contact Keep Athens-Clarke County Beautiful at (706) 613-3501 x312. Your new tree seedlings as well as your old champion trees will love you for your compost.

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