

Greens and Browns: *The basics of collecting compost*

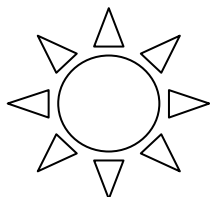
Compiled by **The Compostadores:**
Keepin' the nutrients in the neighborhood!

For a compost pile to break down efficiently, it requires a delicate balance of greens and browns. Do not fear – this process is less intimidating than it sounds, and a not-so-successful pile can be adjusted quite easily.

What *are* greens and browns, anyway? First off, “greens” aren’t always green, and “browns” aren’t always brown. These terms refer to the *type* of materials being placed in the bin. In order to ensure that your compost pile breaks down at an efficient rate, it is best to try to maintain a ratio of 2 to 3 times more browns than greens.

“Greens” are high in *nitrogen* and help the compost **HEAT UP** and **break down**. Greens are closer to their living state—fruit and vegetable scraps, eggshells, living yard waste

“Browns” are high in *carbon* and serve as the **fiber** for the compost. These include things like dead leaves, woodchips, sawdust, hay, dead plants, and brown paper bags.



Static piles

The Compostadores lead bin building workshops of static compost piles. These piles are a low-maintenance means of composting – it is not necessary to turn a static pile for it to break down. Although these piles do take a longer time to break down, they require very little attention and physical labor during the process. The main thing to keep in mind for a static pile is that you must maintain a layering system of browns and greens about 4 inches deep – layers will help ensure that the pile breaks down efficiently.

Where do I go to collect these items?

Greens or browns may be hard to come by, depending on the season. Maintaining this ratio of greens to brown is important to ensure a healthy compost, so it is essential to know where to find these components of your pile.

Greens: According to the US Department of Agriculture, the average family of four is responsible for about **24 lbs of fruit and vegetable waste every month**. That is quite a substantial quantity of greens to be placed in a backyard or community garden bin. Not only expired produce, but peels, rinds, and other fruit and vegetable scraps provide the nitrogen, breaking down very nicely in backyard bins. Eggshells and coffee grinds also are great “greens.”

Browns:

There are two “browns” additions that are especially important in static bins. First, place a layer of straw at the bottom of the bin, to allow for proper aeration. Second, as part of your browns, incorporate wood chips in the bin. They’ll release mycelia which help break down the contents of the bin more quickly.

Browns tend to become highly abundant during the fall, while leaves are falling off trees, and plants are dying. If you have storage space, try bagging this waste and storing it in a dry place, such as a garage, shed, or basement. It can then be utilized all winter long in smaller portions!