



# Tip Sheet 3: Troubleshooting Tips

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## Best Practices to Minimize Pests , Odors or Issues with Backyard Composting of Food Scraps

- **Place compost bin at least 1-3 feet away from walls and other structures.**  
The space around the bin will make it less attractive to critters who don't want to be in open spaces for fear of predators.
- **Keep the area around the compost bin free from clutter and tall growing plants.**  
Critters, such as mice and rats, like to hide behind or underneath tall growing plants and garden tools. Keeping the area clean will prevent critters from hanging out near your compost bin.
- **Always cover any exposed food scraps with 3-4 inches of brown materials.**  
The brown materials (leaves, garden trimmings, etc.) will act as a filter that will decrease potential odors and become less attractive to pests. Be sure to mix in the food scraps.
- **Choose a compost bin that has a secure lid.**  
Having a compost bin with a secure lid will prevent critters from easily getting in. A lid also helps your compost pile to retain moisture during the hot summer months.
- **For stationary compost bins:**
  - a. **Add 4-foot by 4-foot piece of hardware cloth (similar to a metal or mesh screen material) on the ground and place your food scraps compost bin on top.** The hardware cloth will help prevent ground dwelling rodents from entering your bin from underneath.
  - b. **Add 3-4 inches of chopped carbon (brown) materials such as leaves and small branches to the bottom of your compost bin.**  
The added carbon materials will help with air flow and prevent moisture from accumulating in the bin.

## BACKYARD COMPOST TROUBLESHOOTING

Issue	Possible Causes	Solutions
<b>Odors</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Too much moisture and not enough air</li> <li>2. Too much green (nitrogen) material</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Turn pile – mix and turn materials with a shovel or rake</li> <li>2. Add more brown materials</li> <li>3. Temporarily remove the lid to increase air flow and evaporation</li> </ol>
<b>Slow decomposition</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Lack of moisture (water)</li> <li>2. Lack of air flow</li> <li>3. Too much brown (carbon) material</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Add water when turning and mixing the pile</li> <li>2. Chop up bulky branches or twigs to 4-6 inches in size and mix them into the pile</li> <li>3. Add more green materials</li> </ol>
<b>Pile is not heating up</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Pile is too small</li> <li>2. Lack of moisture</li> <li>3. Lack of air flow</li> <li>4. Too much brown material</li> <li>5. Cold weather</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Keep adding more materials to your bin in the right mixture ratio of Browns to Greens (2:1)</li> <li>2. Add water while turning and mixing the pile</li> <li>3. Chop up bulky branches or twigs to 4-6 inches in size and mix them into the pile</li> <li>4. Add more green materials</li> </ol>
<b>Pile gets too hot consistently over 140 degrees Fahrenheit</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Pile is too large</li> <li>2. Lack of air flow</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Split pile into two separate piles - ideal pile size is 3'x3'x3'</li> <li>2. Chop up bulky branches or twigs to 4-6 inches in size and mix them into the pile</li> </ol>
<b>Pests</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Wrong materials in the pile</li> <li>2. Food scraps are exposed</li> <li>3. Bin is not rodent-proof</li> <li>4. Compost bin/pile isn't active</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Avoid all the materials that should not be added to the compost bin. See Tip Sheet 2 for acceptable materials.</li> <li>2. Cover food scraps with 3-4 inches of brown materials</li> <li>3. Make bins less likely to attract rodents by placing hardware cloth beneath the compost bin and securing the lid</li> <li>4. Add moisture to your pile and turn frequently to disturb the potential habitat for pests. Moisture can be introduced through adding more green materials or with water.</li> </ol>



### For More Information

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