

Composting Troubleshooting Guide

Problem	Possible Causes	Solution
Rotten odor	Excess moisture, lack of oxygen (anaerobic conditions) Compaction (anaerobic conditions)	Turn pile or add dry, porous material such as sawdust, wood chips, or straw. Turn pile or make the pile smaller.
Ammonia odor	Too much nitrogen (lack of carbon)	Add high-carbon material such as sawdust, wood chips, or straw.
Low pile temperature	Pile too small Insufficient moisture Poor aeration Lack of nitrogen Cold weather	Make the pile bigger or insulate sides. Add water while turning pile. Turn the pile. Mix in materials that contain nitrogen such as grass clippings or manure. Increase pile size or insulate with an extra layer of straw or similar material.
High pile temperature (>140° F)	Pile too large Insufficient ventilation	Reduce pile size. Turn the pile.
Pests: rats, raccoons, insects	Presence of meat scraps or fatty food waste	Remove meat and fatty foods from the pile. Cover with a layer of soil or sawdust. Build an animal-proof compost bin. Turn the pile to increase temperature.

Revised from original by Charles Marr, Extension specialist, horticulture; Robert Neier, horticulture agent, Sedgwick County.

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