

Want 'black gold' for the garden? Make compost

Transforming garbage into free mulch and fertilizer is a win-win: You can save money and keep your eggshells and weeds out of landfills. Compost is the best additive available for improving soil. Too sandy? Add compost. Too much clay? Add compost. Lacking nutrients? Compost. No wonder gardeners call it black gold. And with all those crunchy leaves about to appear, now is the time to make your own.



SAVE MONEY BY MAKING YOUR OWN HOMEMADE COMPOST {thanks, AP}

- 1** Decide on a container: If aesthetics are important, you can buy a compost bin or tumbler for \$50 to \$300.
- 2** Add 50 percent (or more) of browns: Brown materials are rich in carbon, and many are in fact brown. They include dried perennials, autumn leaves, leather, twigs, paper and hay.
- 3** Add 50 percent (or less) of greens: Green materials are rich in nitrogen and likewise are mostly green. Greens include grass clippings, fruit and veggie scraps and freshly picked weeds. Cornstarch packing peanuts and coffee grinds, though not green, also are rich in nitrogen.
- 4** Keep it moist: Sprinkle the pile lightly with a hose whenever you add a new layer or notice the pile drying out. It should be moist, not soggy.
- 5** Get cookin': As ingredients break down, bacteria heat the center of the pile, so it's important to turn the heap regularly for even decomposition. This can be done with a pitchfork or garden spade on an open pile. Compost tumblers have a crank or weighted design that requires less exertion.
- 6** Spread it: In the spring, about a month before planting, incorporate compost into new garden beds. Sprinkle some on your lawn and gently rake in, and add a few handfuls to planting holes.
- 7** Never: Include fats (meat or fish table scraps, dairy products, oils, etc.) or diseased plants or weeds that have gone to seed in your pile. And never add materials that don't decompose, such as plastic or glass. Bird and rabbit droppings and horse manure are OK, but kitty litter and dog poop are not. {**NEWSDAY**}