

Compost with Wood Chips



If you're wondering what to do with all of the wood chips left from using the wood chipper (shown) to cut down your tree, build a compost pile in your backyard. It's great for adding to your garden to help transplants along and to keep soil healthy. Plus, it's an environmentally smart way to turn household waste into something useful.

There are several things involved in "heating" up your compost and helping it break down faster. First of all, compost piles require several elements to make them work properly. These include moisture, oxygen and a source of nitrogen for proper bacteria action.

Build the pile by starting with a 4 to 8 inch layer of brown material (wood chips) covered by a 2 to 4 inch layer of green material and another layer of brown. Sprinkle with water and mix layers together with a spading fork. Continue building with additional layers until about 3 feet high. Turn the pile weekly with a fork and add water as necessary. The pile should be as moist as a wrung out sponge.

If the pile is too dry or has too much woody material in it, it will not "work" as quickly. Secondly, turning the pile often allows the introduction of air (oxygen) that speeds up the decomposition process. Proper construction of the compost pile involves using approximately equal amounts of brown and green materials. Brown matter is high in carbon and includes dry leaves, sawdust, hay, wood chips, small branches, etc. Green matter is higher in nitrogen and includes things like grass clippings, fruit and vegetable scraps, eggshells, coffee grounds, manure from livestock or poultry, etc. Coarse or large materials should be chopped or shredded to allow the decay producing organisms to reach more surface area and speed up the process.

The addition of manure or green matter will usually speed up the process if the other conditions have been met. There are some compost boosters available in garden centers, but it is hard to say what is available in your area. These are usually a form of nitrogen or microbial enzymes that assist natural occurring bacteria in decomposing the organic matter.