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## COMMON MISTAKES EVEN EXPERIENCED GARDENERS MAKE WHEN COMPOSTING

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Savvy gardeners will be the first to declare nature a bountiful teacher and provider, especially when it comes to composting! Gather fresh plant debris (a nitrogen source), mix with dried plant debris (a carbon source), add cycles of rain and sun (sources of moisture and heat), oxygen, a host of microbes and... Voila! Over time, the best food and nutrition source for the garden has gloriously been "made."

Following nature's example, gardeners have a reliable composting formula to follow but they have to get the mix and ratios of each critical ingredient right if they want to successfully



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create virtual gold for their gardens. Here are some common composting mistakes gardeners need to avoid when building and tending their compost piles!

- Adding too much green material to the compost pile, throwing off the 30% green/70% dry ratio! This mistake can easily be made when, for example, a large, fresh load of grass clippings is added, all at once, to the pile. The result? A smelly pile and a delayed composting process.
- Adding too little dry material to keep the 30% green/70% dry ratio. The result – slow composting and a pile that is potentially too dry. For some, dry matter can be harder to come by. Plan ahead to save dry leaves and twigs that can be cut down into relatively small pieces. No diseased material!
- Mismanaging moisture levels. Too much water leads to diminished oxygen levels, a soggy pile and off-odors. Micro-organisms essential for decomposition also suffer and the composting process slows. In rainy weather, consider covering your compost pile with a tarp to prevent oversaturation and the washing away of precious nutrients! In dry weather, add water as needed to support healthy micro-organisms and to keep the decomposition process going.
- Neglecting to turn the pile frequently enough to add oxygen and distribute moisture. Too-little oxygen means a slowed process, off-odors and fewer oxygen-loving, compost friendly microbes and earthworms! Some people find it useful to compost in a tumbler, instead of pile, to make the aeration process easier – no pitchforks needed!
- Relegating the compost pile to an out-of-sight, off-in-the distance location of your yard. Compost piles that are located for easy, close-to-the-garden access are more likely to be properly maintained, and appreciated!