



TROUBLESHOOTING GUIDE: YOUR OUTDOOR COMPOST BIN

PROBLEM	POSSIBLE CAUSE	SOLUTION
Bad Odor	Uncovered or improperly used food scraps	Remove and discard any improper materials (meats, dairy, etc.); bury materials under one foot or more of non-food materials.
	Anaerobic (without oxygen) pile	Turn materials, mixing in dry leaves, straw, or wood chips. Check base of pile for proper drainage.
	Too much grass or other high-nitrogen material	Add dry or high-carbon materials or remove some “greens,” spread out to dry, and mix back into pile.
Insect Pests (ants, bees, wasps)	Too dry/not mixed properly	Make sure food materials are properly buried, and turn outer layer of materials into core of pile. Moisten pile if necessary to deter bees, wasps, and ants. Use caution when taking wood chips and woody material from potential termite and carpenter ant sources such as rotted wood piles or municipal mulch piles.
Insect Pests (fruit flies, house flies)	Too wet/ not mixed properly	Add top layer of dry brown material (leaves, non-treated wood chips, hay/straw, shredded newspaper). Make sure food materials are properly buried, and turn outer layer of materials into core of pile. Hot piles will destroy or deter most insects, such as grubs and other larvae (maggots).
Insect Pests (sowbugs, beetles)	Not necessarily pests	Not all insects in a compost pile are “pests,” the compost ecosystem includes a host of useful invertebrates, including isopods, millipedes, centipedes, and worms, among others.
Animal Pests	Improper food handling	Keep food scraps buried under other materials. For persistent problems, especially with rodents, stop adding food, increase lid security, or change bin design to restrict access.
Pile not breaking down	Insufficient nitrogen	Add grass, manure, kitchen scraps or other “green” natural nitrogen source.
	Too dry	Add water while turning until moist, not wet; remember, “damp as a wrung-out sponge!”
	Poor aeration	Turn and mix materials more often. Chop or grind large pieces to encourage faster breakdown.
Pile heats up, then stops	Poor aeration	Hot piles need lots of fresh oxygen: turn materials as pile starts to cool down. It might be necessary to add an additional nitrogen source periodically.
Pile only slightly warm in middle	Too small	Piles require a certain critical mass (about 3’ x 3’ x 3’) to work efficiently. Add more materials if possible, or use a smaller bin to concentrate the pile’s volume.