

# Compost Troubleshooting

MASTER **composter**  
soil **BUILDER**



Symptom	Possible Cause	Solution/Alternative
Pile is damp and warm in the middle, but nowhere else	Pile may be too small	Gather enough material to make a pile 3' high, 3' wide, and 3' long.
Pile does not get hot	If pile is moist and sweet smelling, it may not have enough nitrogen	Mix in fresh grass clippings, manure, blood meal, or other high nitrogen fertilizer.
	If pile is very wet—perhaps smells sour, it may not be getting enough air inside	Turn the pile. Mix in dry sawdust, straw, or stalks to improve drainage and air flow.
	Pile may be too small	Gather enough material to make a pile 3' high, 3' wide, and 3' long.
	Pile was built gradually over a few weeks or longer	Let it compost slowly. If materials are still fresh, turn and mix in fresh grass clippings, manure, blood meal, or other high nitrogen fertilizer.
Pile is dry throughout	Lack of water	Turn the pile and spray all materials with water.
Pile smells like rotten eggs, vinegar or garbage	Too wet, not enough oxygen	Turn the pile and mix in coarse dry materials such as leaves, straw, or corn stalks. Cover with plastic during rainy weather.
	Inappropriate materials such as food or pet waste in pile	Remove and dispose of inappropriate materials.
Pile smells like ammonia	Too much nitrogen	Turn the pile and mix in dry materials such as leaves, sawdust, shredded paper, straw, or corn stalks.
Pile is attracting dogs, raccoons, rates, flies, or other pests	Inappropriate materials such as food or pet waste in pile	Remove and dispose of inappropriate materials.
Pile contains earwigs, slugs and other insects	No problem	Slugs should be removed and destroyed so that their eggs are not spread in the garden.



The Master Composter/Soil Builder program is sponsored by Seattle Public Utilities and managed by Seattle Tilth

