

2020 Compost Making Training- TNO Guide

MAKING THE COMPOST PILE

CREATE FRAME OR DIG PIT:

- Sizes described will make compost for 60,000 seedlings. If you want more, make the pit or frame longer
- **Option 1:** Create a wooden frame above the ground to hold the compost in a HEAP
 - Use sticks 2+ m long, firmly insert into the ground
 - Make the box 2 m wide x 5 m long, with sticks placed every 1 m
 - Use rope or string, or bamboo pieces nailed to the sticks, to make secure sides
- **Option 2:** Dig a PIT to place the compost in
 - Dig a pit that is 2 m wide, 2 m deep and 5 m long
 - This method is more work initially but helps to reduce water loss from the pile, is good for use in the dry season



FOUNDATION – Do 1 time only

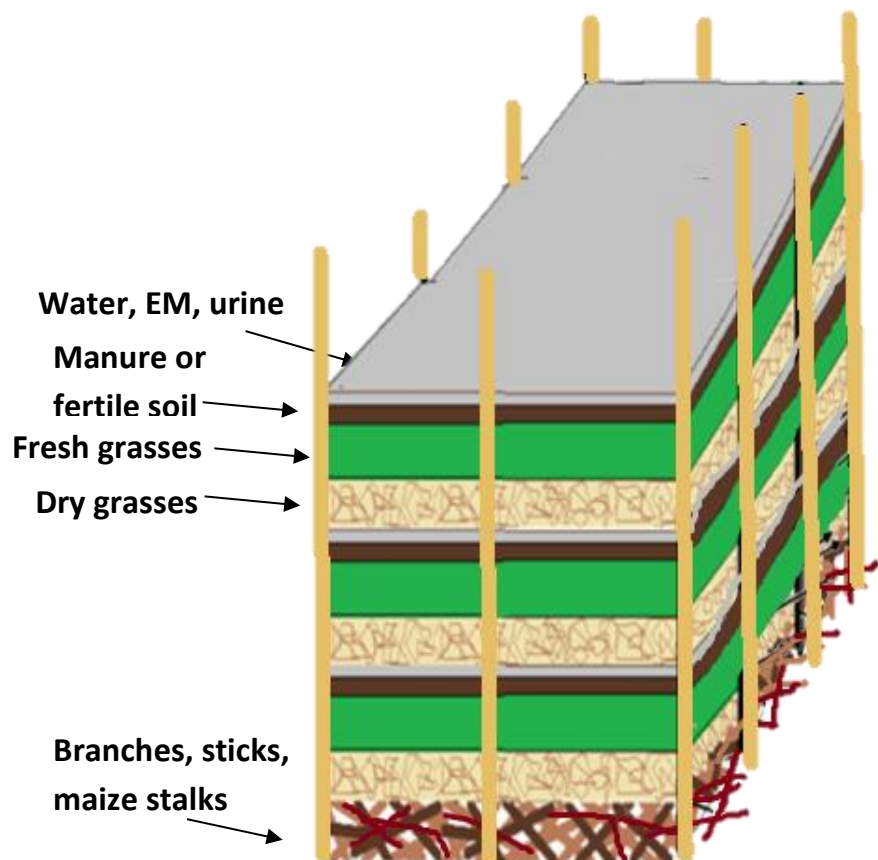
- At the bottom of the pile or pit, make a layer of large sticks, branches, or maize stalks around 30 cm deep
 - Do not compress: This will allow air to enter the pile from the bottom, helping decomposition

LAYER 1- will be repeated:

- Add a layer of dry grasses 15 cm deep
- Add a layer of fresh, green grasses 15 cm deep
- Add a layer of manure (or fertile soil or old compost), 5 cm deep
- Evenly sprinkle in 5 liters of water or diluted urine + 2 liters of Effective Microorganisms (EM), provided by OAF

REPEAT LAYER 1 steps, around 2-3 times, until you have a pile around 1.5 meters high

COVER pile with large leaves to hold in moisture



MANAGING THE COMPOST

LEAVE pile to sit and decompose

- Best if you can leave 3 months+
- Definitely leave AT LEAST 1 month

TURN the pile to improve decomposition

- Do this 1-3 times during this period, every 2-4 weeks
- How to turn the pile:
 - Make a new wooden + bamboo frame and base layer of sticks next to the pile, the same size as original pile
 - Use pitchforks to invert all material from existing pile onto the new base layer, with the old top becoming the new bottom
 - At this time add water more or urine to the pile if it is dry
 - IF you used the pit method, dig a new pit and transfer the compost from 1 pit to the other

TEST decomposition in the pile

- Insert a stick into the middle
- Pull it out and touch immediately
- If it is WARM then decomposition is active, leave the pile alone
- If it is COLD then decomposition has stopped
 - Try turning the pile and/or add more water or urine
 - Check if maybe the compost is ready

WHEN IS COMPOST READY?

- Inserted stick comes out cold
- Will look dark in color and should smell earthy like soil
- Should have uniform small pieces, not recognizable as the original plant matter you put in
- Unfinished compost with leaves and sticks not fully broken down can be used as MULCH but is not good to use in the potting mix for seedlings

