



Manure Compost Troubleshooting Guide

Condition or Situation	Possible source or reason	Other Clues	Solution
Pile fails to heat	Pile too dry	Cannot squeeze water from material	Add water/wet the pile
	Material too wet	Materials look or feel soggy, pile slumps, moisture content greater than 60%	Turn and/or cover pile, add dry amendments and remix
	Not enough nitrogen, or slowly degrading or stable materials	C:N ratio greater than 50:1, large amount of woody materials	Add high nitrogen ingredients, change recipe
	small pile size, cold weather	Pile height less than 3 feet	Enlarge or combine piles, add highly degradable materials.
	Poor structure	Pile settles quickly, few large particles, not excessively wet	Add bulking agent
	pH excessively low	pH measures less than 5.5, garbage-like odor	Add lime or wood ash
Temperature falls consistently over several days	Low oxygen	Temperature declines gradually rather than sharply	Turn or aerate pile
	Low moisture	Cannot squeeze water from material	Add water
	Composting complete		
Odors	Materials too wet, insufficient aeration.	Low temperatures	Turn pile, add PVC pipes, cover
Fly or mosquito problem	Flies breeding in uncomposted manure	Fresh manure or food material at pile surface, flies hover around the piles	Cover pile with a tarp or a 6-inch layer of finished compost to prevent access or turn piles every 4 – 7 days.
	Flies breeding in raw materials	Wet raw materials stored on site more than 4 days	Handle raw materials promptly
	Mosquitoes breeding in stagnant water	Standing puddles of water, nutrient-rich pond or lagoon	Grade site properly, maintain pad surface, maintain holding pond or lagoon in aerobic condition

Table 3-1: Troubleshooting guide Chapter 3: Field Guide to On-Farm Composting NRAES 114 – www.mwps.org