

Composting Pile vs. Barrel



Rutherford County
Garden Basics

Pile		Barrel
Can be virtually any size, from small to very large. A minimum size of 1 Cubic Yard is recommended.	Size	Size is limited by the dimensions of the barrel or tumbler.
May require supplemental water to maintain adequate moisture. Outside of pile often dried by sun and wind. May be saturated by rain.	Moisture	Can be difficult to drain or evaporate excess moisture. Compost usually stays evenly moist.
A pile of sufficient size will usually maintain its internal temperature. Outside of pile may freeze in winter.	Temperature	Sunshine may increase temperature inside barrel. Contents may freeze in winter.
Size may be a limiting factor. In residential settings, may need to be concealed by fencing or shrubs. Not easily moved.	Location	May offer many location options, and be easy to conceal. Relatively easy to move or relocate.
May be time consuming and physically demanding to turn or aerate the pile.	Aeration	Usually quick and easy to turn the barrel for mixing and aeration; encourages more frequent aeration.
A typical amount of time to complete the composting process is 3 to 6 months. A pile of mostly woody/carbon materials may require a year or longer.	Time	The composting process may be completed in as little as 3 to 4 weeks. Allow 2 months or more if conditions are less than ideal.
When the compost is finished, it's time to break out the pitchfork and wheelbarrow!	Distribution	May be easier to empty the finished compost from a raised tumbler. Barrel can be rolled to garden bed and dumped.

by Mark Murphy
mark.tnmg@gmail.com