VIDHYARANYA · FREE PRINTABLE

Composting Troubleshooting Chart

Most compost problems come down to balance: greens vs browns, air and moisture.

Quick reference

Greens (nitrogen)	Browns (carbon)	Keep out
Vegetable and fruit peels, tea leaves, coffee grounds, fresh plant trimmings, crushed eggshells	Dry leaves, shredded plain cardboard, newspaper, untreated sawdust, cocopeat, dry straw	Meat, fish, dairy, oily food, pet waste, glossy paper, plastic, diseased plants

Problems and fixes

What you notice	Likely cause	What to do
Rotten or sour smell	Too wet, too many greens, not enough air	Add a generous layer of browns, mix well, check drainage holes
Ammonia smell	Too much nitrogen	Add dry leaves or cardboard; turn the pile
Fruit flies	Exposed food scraps	Bury fresh scraps under browns; keep lid closed
Maggots	Wet, exposed scraps; possibly meat or dairy	Remove animal products, cover with browns, dry the mix
Nothing is happening	Too dry or too many browns; pieces too large	Sprinkle water, add greens, chop scraps smaller
Ants	Too dry	Moisten slightly and mix
Soggy and slimy	Too wet, poor airflow	Add browns, drill more air holes, turn more often
Rodents	Food scraps accessible	Use a closed bin with a lid; avoid cooked food

Is it ready?

- [ ] Dark brown and crumbly
- [ ] Smells earthy, like a forest floor
- [ ] Original scraps no longer recognisable (except tough bits — sieve and return them)