

CREATING MEL'S MIX™ & COMPOST

MEL'S MIX™ MATERIALS

The magic of Square Foot Gardening is not only the space planning, but in the soil mix. These are the ingredients and quantities for Mel's Mix™, which will ensure that your Square Foot Garden thrives and produces far better than gardens grown in standard garden soil.



1/3 COMPOST



1/3 PEAT MOSS



**1/3 COARSE
VERMICULITE**

MEL'S MIX™ CALCULATOR CHARTS

Here are some handy charts explaining how much Mel's Mix™ you need for common SFG box sizes and explaining how many 5 gallon buckets each of peat moss, compost, and coarse vermiculite you need to make specific volumes of Mel's Mix™.

VOLUME OF MEL'S MIX™ NEEDED

| BOX DIMENSIONS | BOX VOLUME | BOX DIMENSIONS | BOX VOLUME |
|---------------------------------|---------------|----------------------------------|---------------|
| 4 × 4 feet × 6 inches (½ foot) | 8 cubic feet | 4 × 4 feet × 12 inches (1 foot) | 16 cubic feet |
| 4 × 8 feet × 6 inches (½ foot) | 16 cubic feet | 4 × 8 feet × 12 inches (1 foot) | 32 cubic feet |
| 4 × 12 feet × 6 inches (½ foot) | 24 cubic feet | 4 × 12 feet × 12 inches (1 foot) | 48 cubic feet |
| 4 × 16 feet × 6 inches (½ foot) | 32 cubic feet | 4 × 16 feet × 12 inches (1 foot) | 64 cubic feet |
| 2 × 4 feet × 6 inches (½ foot) | 4 cubic feet | 2 × 4 feet × 12 inches (1 foot) | 8 cubic feet |
| 2 × 8 feet × 6 inches (½ foot) | 8 cubic feet | 2 × 8 feet × 12 inches (1 foot) | 16 cubic feet |
| 2 × 12 feet × 6 inches (½ foot) | 12 cubic feet | 2 × 12 feet × 12 inches (1 foot) | 24 cubic feet |
| 2 × 16 feet × 6 inches (½ foot) | 16 cubic feet | 2 × 16 feet × 12 inches (1 foot) | 32 cubic feet |
| 1 × 4 feet × 6 inches (½ foot) | 2 cubic feet | 1 × 4 feet × 12 inches (1 foot) | 4 cubic feet |
| 1 × 8 feet × 6 inches (½ foot) | 4 cubic feet | 1 × 8 feet × 12 inches (1 foot) | 8 cubic feet |
| 1 × 12 feet × 6 inches (½ foot) | 6 cubic feet | 1 × 12 feet × 12 inches (1 foot) | 12 cubic feet |
| 1 × 16 feet × 6 inches (½ foot) | 8 cubic feet | 1 × 16 feet × 12 inches (1 foot) | 16 cubic feet |

5 GALLON BUCKET RECIPE

| Total Cubic Feet of Mel's Mix Needed™ | # of 5 Gallon Buckets Each of Peat Moss, Coarse Vermiculite, and Compost Needed |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| 2 | 1 bucket each |
| 4 | 2 buckets each |
| 6 | 3 buckets each |
| 8 | 4 buckets each |
| 12 | 6 buckets each |
| 16 | 8 buckets each |
| 24 | 12 buckets each |
| 32 | 16 buckets each |
| 48 | 24 buckets each |
| 64 | 32 buckets each |

HANDY COMPOST INSTRUCTIONS

For those of you who are just getting started with composting, or for gardeners who'd love a refresher, here are some of Mel's best tips for successful composting.

| TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL COMPOSTING | | |
|--------------------------------|--|--|
| | Do | Don't |
| Ingredients | Add plant material such as top growth, prunings, roots, and kitchen scraps | Do not add any animal parts such as bones or synthetic materials |
| Bin Size | About 3 x 3 feet | Smaller than 3 x 3 feet or larger than 4 x 4 feet |
| Moisture | Moist | Too dry or too wet |
| Mixing | As often as you can | Never |

PRACTICAL COMPOSTING TIPS

Mow Those Leaves

Save some of your leaves from fall to add to the compost pile next year rather than all at once. After you rake them up, run the lawnmower over them to chop them up and then stuff them into plastic bags (make sure they are dry) or, if you are a "neatnik," store them in gray garbage bins stored along the wall of your compost operation.

Dry That Grass

If piled up, fresh green grass will quickly turn into a black-hat, anaerobic operation that's a stinking, slimy, gooey mess. Grass clippings have to be dried before adding them to the pile or stored for later addition. It does seem like an oxymoron to dry the grass clippings only to moisten them in the compost pile, but now I'm sure you can see why we do it that way.

I compare it to my mother's meatloaf. She would dry bread and then crumble it to make bread crumbs. She would then add milk to moisten everything. If she had just added moist, fresh bread, it would have gotten clumpy and gooey. The compost is similar. If material is put in wet, it packs down in clumps preventing air from entering the pile, and then it rots and smells.

So, spread your grass clippings out on a tarp or the driveway, turn them a few times with a rake or flip your tarp before storing them or adding them to your compost pile. How long? Until the grass is brownish and dry to the touch. It depends on the sun, humidity, and rain, as well as the climate of your location.

Mix and Turn

This is a good time to remind you that the center of the pile is where most of the action is. It will be the hottest (up to 150°F or 65°C), the moistest, and with the most white-hats running around decomposing the ingredients. Knowing all that when you turn the contents of one compost bin into another, you will be putting the top of A into the bottom of B—assuming you have two bins or piles side-by-side—then you make sure you put the outside material of A into the inside of B. Get it? It's just like the theory that opposites attract. Mix in (at the same time) opposite colors, wetness, size—everything opposite for the fastest operation. In other words, brown with green, wet with dry, coarse with fine. That's all easy to remember—just think of opposites attracting, and you'll have a great operation.

Excerpted from Square Foot Gardening, 2nd edition

DO'S & DON'TS

If you're confused about what to add to your compost pile, and in what quantities, this chart will help you out. Mel compiled a detailed list of what ingredients should and should not be used in your garden — and when you have healthy, living compost, you're 1/3 of the way to creating your own Mel's Mix™!

DETAILED LIST OF INGREDIENTS

| Yes | Caution - Limited Amounts | No |
|--|--|---|
| <i>Each item should be under 20 percent of total by volume</i> | <i>Each item should be under 10 percent of total by volume</i> | <i>These items should not be added to a compost bin</i> |
| Eggshells (crushed) | Coffee grounds | Bakery products |
| Grass Clippings (dried) | Corn cobs | Cat or dog manure |
| Hay (including salt hay) | Hedge trimmings | Cheese |
| Leaves | Peanut shells | Dairy products |
| Newspaper (shredded) | Pine needles | Diseased or pest-laden materials |
| Old sod | Sawdust | Grease |
| Reject or spoiled garden produce | Shredded bark | Kitchen scraps |
| Stable or poultry manure | Shredded twigs | Meat or bones |
| Straw | Wood shavings | Seeds and fruit pits |
| Tea bags | | Whole eggs |
| Vegetable and fruit peels | | |

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RESOURCES

If you're having trouble locating vermiculite, you can order it online from <https://uline.com> — now it's never been easier to create your own Mel's Mix™ with all the recommended ingredients!