

Hand-Squeeze Quick Test for Pile Moisture

Moisture levels in a compost pile can be estimated using the “hand-squeeze” method. After a certain amount of practice, your hand becomes “calibrated” allowing you to evaluate moisture without other equipment.

The hand-squeeze method is good for quick tests out in the field, but should not replace periodic drying tests.

Procedure

- (1) Reach into the pile and grab a handful of composting material.
- (2) Squeeze the material firmly, observing your fist.
- (3) Release your grip and allow the material to stay in your hand.
- (4) Inspect the material and your hand.

Interpretation

Observations	% Moisture (estimation)
Material is crumbly; doesn't stick together; hand is dry	40 %
Material sticks together; hand is moist, “glistens”	50 %
Material sticks together and drips; hand is wet and dripping	60%

Notes:

- Researchers report that the ideal moisture range is from 52% to 58%.
- Gardening professionals report that around 50% is the ideal moisture for planting and growing.

Additional notes