



RENU COMPOSTING GUIDE: 2021



WHAT IS COMPOSTING?

Composting is nature's way of recycling organic matter and nutrients. It is the circular process of growing, eating, and disposing of our food waste.

Compost is made when organic waste is placed into a vessel and given time to decompose back into component nutrients. Once the matter has decomposed the compost can be released back to the soil to continue the cycle.



WHY COMPOST?

By composting you can:

- Save money on bin collection and artificial fertilisers,
- Reduce household waste
- You can use your nutrient-rich, organic fertiliser to enhance your garden plants.

Did you know?
Soil naturally absorbs
greenhouse gases and plants
feed on them



"By composting at home, you reduce the need to collect, process, treat and/or dispose of biodegradable materials. This reduces pressure on our peatlands, saves landfill space, reduces the fuel needed to move things around and cuts greenhouse gas emissions". (An Taisce, 2020)

1. GETTING STARTED

Choose where you want to place your compost bin. It is important that you have easy access, as you will need to fill, turn, and dampen the contents regularly.

Ideally, choose a shady spot in your garden, out of direct sunlight.

It's best to keep your compost pile covered as this will ensure rain does not saturate the pile. It will also deter pests from consuming the contents.



2. COLLECT ENOUGH MATERIAL

As you garden, gather materials in front of your compost bin until you have enough to fill your compost bin, at least halfway. Be sure to chop or shred materials so that they can be easily mixed and turned.

DO put in the compost pile:	DON'T put in the compost pile:
Vegetable/fruit scraps	Meat, fish scraps/eggs
Grass clippings/yard trimmings	Dairy products (cheese, milk)
Coffee grounds/tea bags	Diseased or insect infested plants.
Paper/paper towels	Roots of invasive weeds (bramble, ivy)
Eggshells	Processed foods/sticky labels on fruits & vegetables.
Fireplace ashes	Coal/charcoal ash
Wood chips, sawdust, toothpicks, matches from untreated wood.	Scraps/yard trimmings treated with pesticides



Top Tip: Chopping materials into 3 – 6cm pieces ensures faster composting as there is more surface area for the microbes to work on.

3. WHAT MATERIALS TO USE?

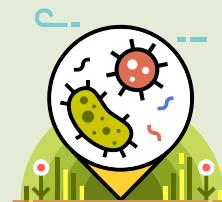
It's important to pay attention to the materials being composted, as this is an essential part of the process.



If you want to compost nitrogen-rich grass cuttings and food scraps ("greens"), you must balance them out with "brown", woody materials which are carbon rich. Food scraps can be added to a composter within a week or two of adding a fresh batch to the system.

The recommended balance is 1/3 green versus 2/3 brown materials.

GREENS VS BROWNS

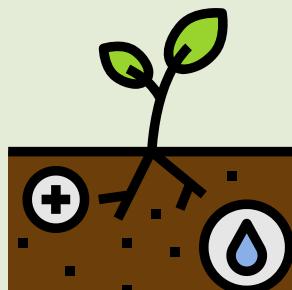
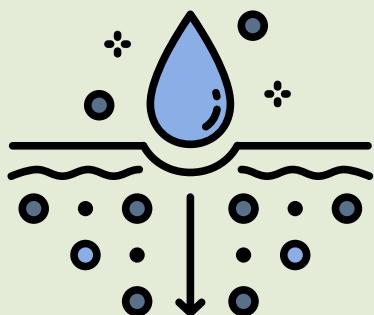


Greens	Browns
Dry Grass Cuttings	Corrugated cardboard (no shiny/waxy coating)
Fruit and Vegetable Scraps	Hedge Trimmings, dry leaves
Table scraps	Egg Shells
Dead Flowers and household plants	Paper (newspaper, coffee filters, paper plates)
Stale Bread	Wood chippings, Sawdust
Tea Bags	Lint from the tumble dryer
Kelp, Seaweed, Weeds (without the seeds)	Wood Ash (not coal)

Top Tip: Having a good mix of high quality materials will ensure you have high quality compost for your garden!

4. MOISTURE IS KEY

A dry compost pile will not heat up, which is essential in the composting process. You need to dampen your compost pile to ensure the materials have enough moisture to break down.



If you are gardening in dry or sunny weather, it's a good idea to water materials as you mix the pile. This ensures that the pile is damp (not soaked!).

Top Tip: If you squeeze the materials in your hand and a stream of water comes out, the pile is too wet.

To rectify this:

1. You can try water the materials outside of the composter. This will allow excess moisture to be drained off the materials and soaked into the ground.
2. You can water the materials in the turning system as you rotate your compost bin. This will allow the moisture to be evenly distributed throughout the pile.

5. TURNING OVER YOUR PILE

Once you have added all the materials and water into the compost pile, mix the materials together and leave it for two weeks. This is when the pile will heat up. After approximately a week, the temperature will decrease as the levels of oxygen and microbe activity decreases.



Top Tip: Sometimes, just turning a hot pile will release moisture. If your pile is wet but not soaked, try turning the pile to dry it out.



Every two weeks, you should turn over the compost. By doing so, you will re-introduce air into the compost materials, accelerating the decomposition process.

Depending on the mix of green/brown materials used, the moisture level and consistent air flow through the pile, compost can be ready in 12 – 14 weeks.

6. MONITOR THE PILE



Every three or four days, monitor the moisture and temperature levels of the compost. Turning over your pile is important as it allows for air flow through the pile, ensuring it is hot and damp throughout.



Rotate the barrel every two weeks.

After turning, you should see the temperature increase again. After the second or third turn, the materials may not heat up as much as in the beginning of the process. This is because the food within the composting pile (your greens and browns) has been consumed by the microbes and the compost is almost ready.



Materials should glisten with moisture and feel wet to the touch. Then you will need to add in dry materials such as sawdust, shredded paper, leaves or straw to soak up the excess moisture when the pile is turned. Begin by mixing garden materials on the ground in front of the bin. Food scraps can continue to be added to a composter within a week or two of adding a batch to the system.

7. WHAT CAN GO WRONG?

Symptom	Cause	Solution
Distasteful smells	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not enough air. - Pile is too wet. - Meat/fish/dairy added. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Turn to aerate the pile. - Add more 'browns' (e.g., bush trimmings, leaves, wood chippings). - Limit food scraps to vegetables/fruits.
Pile is dry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pile is in direct sunlight. - Not enough moisture. - Too much woody material. - Pile is too small. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Relocate the composter - Turn it and moisten materials. - Cover the pile. - Add green materials (e.g., food scraps).
Pile is damp, but materials are not breaking down.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Materials are too big - Lack of green materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Shred/chop materials before adding to the pile. - Turn more frequently. - Add more green materials (e.g., grass trimmings).
When you open the tumbler a swarm of midgets fly out.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pile is too wet - Food scraps are placed on top 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mix in more 'brown'/dry materials. - Bury food scraps within the pile
Pile is remaining cold.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not enough material. - Too dry. - Not enough fresh green materials. - Particles too big. - Compacted or too dense. There are no air spaces in the pile. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Make bigger batches - Add moisture when pile is turned - Add green materials when turned - Chop/shred materials - Turn to introduce air and loosen up the pile
Sharp ammonia smell and/or clumps of slimy grass.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Excess of green materials. - Too much fresh grass. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Remember the 30/60 rule of mixing green and brown materials. - Allow grass cuttings to dry for 1-2 days before adding them.
Pile has shrunk, but looks undecomposed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The pile is dry on the outside and composted inside. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If compost is not ready, turn pile, add water if necessary and allow it to finish. - If compost is ready, harvest compost and use undecomposed material to start a new batch.

Rats live in the pile



- High protein food waste in pile
- Food waste on top
- Warm and dry

- Bury food scraps into pile and cover with browns/dry materials
- Stop adding meat/dairy products to bin
- Turn pile frequently to disturb nesting
- Place mesh around the bottom of the bin

REMEMBER NOT TO...

Don't add materials to the pile and walk away.

Always turn over the pile to incorporate new materials in!



It's a good idea to mix your woody materials and kitchen waste before added them to the pile itself.

Use a variety of kitchen and garden materials to start your pile.



A greater variety of organic materials will enrich your compost

Make sure to bury your food scraps within the pile. Mix them in and cover them with straw, sawdust or bush trimmings!



By burying your food scraps by 20 - 30cm, you will deter pests and flies!

Don't put invasive weeds into your compost pile



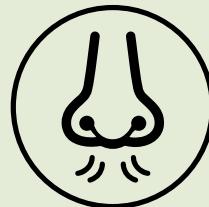
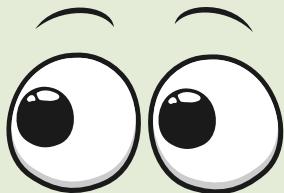
The seeds will contaminate the compost. When you sprinkle compost in your garden, weeds will grow!

8. HARVEST YOUR COMPOST



So how do you know if the compost is ready?

- When the materials do not heat up again after turning. Your compost should feel cool to the touch
- When there is nothing recognisable in a brown heap.
- When the compost does not have a strong smell. It should have an earthy, soil like smell.
- When the compost feels crumbly.



If in doubt, trust your instincts. If the materials have a strong smell or are still warm to hot, then just allow the materials to sit for 2-4 more weeks to mature. Once you have removed the compost from the bin, you can use the compost as a mulch or as a fertilizer for your plants.

9. USEFUL LINKS

An Taisce - compost for nature

EPA.ie - Composting at Home

Cré Compost - Compost Use in Organic Growing

BBC - Gardening Guides

