

Your easy guide to composting



A guide to making successful compost

Why compost?

Composting is an easy and effective way to dispose of organic waste. By composting you can produce your own top quality product, rich in nutrients, to use in your garden. You will also be improving your environment by recycling approximately 25% of your waste.

Getting started

You will need a compost bin with a lid. This will help to protect your compost from the elements. It will also decrease the chance of vermin visiting and will help to prevent weeds from growing.

- Place the bin in a sunny spot away from your main building
- Choose a location where there is good access to and from the bin
- Place the bin on a soil base and add a few layers of twigs/branches at the bottom to improve drainage

What to put in your compost bin

You will need to have a balance of **green waste** (items that are fresh, moist, rich in nitrogen and rot down easily) and **brown waste** (items that are dry, rot down more slowly and add carbon and fibre).

Your compost will work best if you aim to have an equal mix of both green and brown waste in your bin.



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Examples of green and brown waste

Green waste		Brown waste		Items to avoid	
Apple/pear cores	✓	Shredded Paper	✓	Cooked foods	✗
Banana skins	✓	Scrap paper	✓	Bread	✗
Carrot stubs	✓	Scrunched up paper	✓	Dairy products	✗
Vegetable peelings	✓	Newspaper	✓	Meat/fish scraps	✗
Egg shells	✓	Cardboard	✓		
Tea bags	✓	Small twigs	✓		
Coffee grounds	✓				
Dead flowers	✓				
Wet paper towels	✓				
Grass	✓				

Garden waste

Garden waste can be added to your compost bin. However, if you have a lot of garden waste it is best to make a large pile of this and compost it separately. This process is known as hot composting.

You can do this by creating an open pile or by using an open topped compost bin.

Use an old piece of carpet or cardboard to keep your heap covered, this will help to retain the heat and deter vermin. By composting large amounts of garden waste in this way, you can build up the heat of your pile quickly and can make compost in a relatively short time. This method also helps to free up space in your general compost bin.

Top tips

- Put in a mixture of green and brown waste
- Don't add too much of one kind of waste
- Add moisture regularly
- Aerate regularly (by stirring, poking or turning)
- Chop up large items, the smaller the material the quicker it will rot
- Retain the heat in the bin by keeping contents covered over with card

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Troubleshooting

Problem with the compost	Cause	Solution
Compost not breaking down	Not enough material in the bin and/or material too large The material needs longer to compost	Add more material, chop large items into pieces Leave material to compost for a minimum of six months
Dry compost/ants in the bin	Contents are too dry	Add 3-4 watering cans of water regularly
Strong odour	Pile too wet or compacted Too much nitrogen rich green waste	Add brown waste and increase air supply by stirring, poking or turning the contents Add some brown waste to equal out the balance
Green mould in the pile	Lack of oxygen	Add air to the bin. Stir, poke or turn the contents
Fruit flies in the bin	A lot of uncovered green waste	Cover large amounts of green waste with newspaper or cardboard before putting in the bin Line caddies with newspaper, then use this to wrap contents before adding to bin
Presence of rats	Wrong material being put in the bin e.g. cooked foods/meat or fish	Remove offending items Wrap nitrogen rich (green waste) in newspaper whenever large amounts are being added

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Your final product

The composting process can take between 4-18 months to decompose, depending on how warm the contents become and what material goes in. The final compost would be dark brown, moist and crumbly. Some twigs and eggshells may remain, other than that, no unrotted material should be present.

The best way to access your final compost is to lay a sheet of plastic on the ground next to the bin. First, lift up the whole bin and, using a garden spade or fork, transfer any unrotted material from the top of the compost onto the sheet. Next, transfer the remaining compost to a bucket or wheelbarrow and take it to the desired location. Finally, put the bin back together and place the unrotted material back inside for further composting.

Your finished compost will be quite nitrogen rich, it should be applied in the spring and summer seasons when plants require a feed. Your compost can be dug into soil (no deeper than 6-8 inches) or used as a top layer of mulch wherever some feeding/conditioning is required. Remember the compost will be too rich on its own for seed sowing.

There are a number of options for using your compost

- Add it as a top layer to soil around plants and shrubs
- Dig it into soil that you are using to grow vegetables
- Add it as a layer on top of pot containers, this helps to feed the plants and reduce water loss
- Add it as mulch to shrubs and hardy plants every year or so
- Use a soil sieve and sprinkle it finely over grass/lawns to help improve quality.

