



A GUIDE TO EASY COMPOSTING

WHAT YOU DON'T EAT, YOUR GARDEN WILL

Compost is nature's way of recycling organic matter and returning it to the soil. When you compost at home you reduce the amount of waste (and odours) in your wheelie bin while producing free fertiliser for your garden.

SETTING UP

1. To start, you will need one, preferably two compost bins and a well-sealed bucket to collect kitchen scraps. Both items are available at local gardening and hardware stores.
2. Position your compost bin on well-drained soil, with convenient access from the kitchen, but not too close to the house or the neighbours.
3. Dig your compost bin into the ground slightly to help prevent vermin from gaining access to the heap.
4. Ideally, set-up two compost bins so you can add to one while the other is in the final stages of composting.
5. To build the compost, start with a thick layer (15cm) of twigs or coarse mulch at the base for drainage. Sprinkle a shovel load of dirt or compost onto this layer to promote microbial activity. Then follow the easy A, B, C formula (see Layering below) to build a heap layer upon layer.

LAYERING

Alternate layers of green organics and brown organics will promote low maintenance, trouble-free composting and the fast turn-around from organic waste to organic resource.

A. Thin layer of green organics.

B. Cover with a slightly thicker layer of brown organics ensuring no food waste is left exposed.

C. Lightly moisten.

Continue to repeat this process, observing and refining your technique as you go.



WHAT TO COMPOST

Composting works best if you add alternate layers of rapidly decomposing 'green' organics and slower decomposing 'brown' organics.

- **GREEN ORGANICS:** fruit & vegetable scraps, cooked table scraps, stale bread, tea-bags, coffee grounds, egg-shells, fresh lawn clippings, animal manure.
- **BROWN ORGANICS:** dry leaves, twigs, newspaper, straw and mulch.

WHAT NOT TO COMPOST

- Weeds with bulbs such as nut grass
- Diseased plant materials
- Meat scraps
- Large amounts of citrus and onion scraps
- Dog and cat droppings
- Thorny stems (eg. rose stems)
- Treated wood products
- Cooking oil
- Plant materials with pesticide or herbicide residue

beyond the garden path



USING THE COMPOST

- The compost is ready when brown and crumbly with no smell, and you can't identify the individual ingredients.
- Dig it into the vegetable garden, sprinkle around the drip line of trees and shrubs and sift for use in pot plants, or for top dressing lawns.

ROUTINE MAINTENANCE

Occasional maintenance tasks for your compost:

- Aerate the heap by turning with a garden fork. A simple way to reduce the need to turn the heap is to drill holes in a piece of poly-pipe and place through the heap to allow air in. Proper layering will also reduce the need to turn the heap so often.
- Check moisture levels. The heap should be just moist but not wet. If you have a wet or saturated compost heap, mix more dry brown garden organics through it, or turn it and leave the lid off the bin on a sunny day.
- Add a layer of soil or old compost to your heap each month to speed up the composting process.
- Observe any problems (eg. heap is too wet) and fix using the trouble-shooting guide.

TROUBLE-SHOOTING

Getting the right combination of ingredients, air and moisture in your compost may take a little practice, but most problems can be easily overcome.

Smelly Compost?

Your compost can start to smell if it gets too wet or if there is not enough air in the heap. A common cause is putting in too much food waste, which is high in water, and not enough dry ingredients (ie. brown organics).

Fix it! Fork in dry leaves or garden mulch. Garden lime, dolomite or woodfire ash added to the heap will also 'sweeten' it (lime reduces the acidity caused by excessive green organics which are nitrogen-rich materials.)

Turn the compost to get more air in.

Combine green organics with sawdust or shredded newspaper before adding to the heap.

Unwelcome Visitors?

Ants, cockroaches, mice or rats can sometimes make your compost their home.

Do not despair, there are millions of friendly creatures in your compost heap and some simple methods can get rid of the unwelcome ones.

Fix it! Avoid placing dairy products, meat and seafood in the compost as they can attract vermin.

Make sure the compost is hot in the centre to 'cook' fly and cockroach eggs.

Turn the heap regularly if ants and cockroaches are a problem.

Digging in the compost bin (see Setting Up) or placing fine wire under the compost bin will help keep out mice and rats.

Compost Slow To Mature?

A slow composting system can mean that the compost is not hot enough, or there may not be enough air or water.

Fix it! Heat up the heap by adding nitrogen rich materials such as animal manure, blood and bone, kitchen organics or green garden organics.

Turn the heap and add water.

More Information - Home composting literature is abundant. Visit the web or your local Library to read more about the wonderful world of home composting.



TELL US WHAT YOU THINK

Visit greenthumb.cairns.qld.gov.au to ask a question, post a comment and read what others are saying about waste and recycling and other sustainable living issues.

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