

Make Your Own Compost



You can make perfect compost with the waste you already produce and a few simple composting principles. It's the most effective way of dealing with organic waste, and nature's best soil conditioner.

Getting started

You can buy a compost bin or make your own. Good composting doesn't even require a bin, but they do keep things tidy and contained if you're in an urban setting. The bigger the bin or heap, the faster things will decompose

(1m x 1m x 1m is recommended).

How to compost

This way of composting is good for homes with a mix of garden, food waste, cardboard and paper.

Start your compost in a discreet corner with a layer of criss-crossed sticks on bare soil or grass. This helps with drainage and aeration. Then, add alternate layers of green matter (nitrogen rich, wet, often green or colourful and smelly) and brown matter (carbon rich, dry, often brittle or dusty), adding more material as you produce it. Aim for half green and half brown material, by volume.

Cover your heap (with a plastic lid, carpet or tarpaulin) to maintain moisture levels. The compost should be damp but not sludgy. You can turn the heap with a spade to help aerate it and speed up the process, or poke holes through it.

Perfectly decomposed compost is a fine dark brown mixture with the appearance of good crumbly chocolate cake, smelling of nothing but clean earth. Compost can be ready as soon as 6-8 weeks if well aerated.



Turn old pallets into a cheap compost bin



Composting: Green / Nitrogen

Yes:

- Food scraps
- Manure
- Fresh grass clippings
- Weeds without seeds
- Seaweed
- Tea leaves and bags
- Coffee grounds

No:

- Meat & fish
- Invasive weeds*
- Diseased plants
- Cat and dog faeces

* Kill weed seeds by putting them in a plastic bag and hanging in the sun for several weeks. They then can be composted without danger.

Composting: Brown / Carbon

Yes:

- Torn up newspaper (with biodegradable ink)
- Cardboard (avoid ink)
- Tree prunings (chopped)
- Dry leaves & bark
- Untreated sawdust
- Wood ash & twigs & sticks

No:

- Glossy magazines
- Non-organics: tin, glass, plastics
- Woody material less than 1cm wide
- Bamboo, flax, cabbage tree leaves



Troubleshooting

Too wet: compost should be damp but sludgy. If it's too wet this usually means your compost pile doesn't have enough carbon-rich material (brown/dry). Add straw, twigs or newspaper.

Too dry: The water content of your compost should feel similar to that of a wrung-out sponge. It will either need water or more nitrogen-rich material (green/colourful/wet). Sprinkle it with water or add more green materials.

Smelly compost: usually means lack of brown/carbon materials or air - add more brown materials and turn compost weekly to aerate.

Rats! Add grass clippings and turn your compost to increase

the heat and discourage rodents. Carbon materials on top as well as throughout your heap will discourage tempting smells. Chicken wire under the bin might be a last resort.

Other ways to compost

Bokashi bin

Great if you don't have a garden or much space, and if your only organic waste is food waste rather than garden waste). Buy a [Bokashi set](#)

Worm farm

The most functional worm system is a [HungryBin](#) or you can make your own with a series of stacked plastic containers. Worms like most food waste and paper, and regular feeding. Worm farms produce worm castings which can be used as fertiliser, and

worm "juice" which is an excellent liquid fertiliser when diluted.

Slow cold compost pile

Good if you have lots of garden waste rather than food waste. Slower and less maintenance than other systems. Can be done in a heap in the corner of your garden or in a compost bin.

Hot compost pile

This system needs lots of materials in one go but is great for big autumn/spring clean-ups and produces lots of good compost quickly. Labour intensive. Worth researching more before starting.

Tips and tricks

- The smaller the pieces, the faster they break down. Chop up food and garden scraps if you're in a hurry!
- Using your compost - Dig into garden beds in spring, 2-3 weeks before planting, or anytime you're digging over a garden bed. Spread it on the surface of your veg garden as mulch or around fruit trees, or make it into potting mix.

