

How to Make Compost

Eventually everything nature produces returns naturally to the earth and is recycled to provide land nourishment for future generations. Left alone all organic waste will compost itself eventually, but favourable conditions will shorten the time needed for complete breakdown of materials.

By following a few simple steps your reward will be a plentiful supply of friable, nutritional garden compost, delivered free on site to enrich the soil of your garden and provide material, which can be used for seasonal planting. It will reduce the need for chemical fertilisers.



Choosing a Compost Bin

When composting household waste it is important to use a compost bin to prevent unwanted scavengers. We have designed a wooden compost bin and lid, which we think is perfect for the job. It meets all the requirements you would want from any compost bin so when choosing one yourself remember a compost bin should be:

- Easy to erect – preferably slot together to make an attractive looking container
- Easy to fill – A large opening at the top and removable lid for access
- Easy to empty – Removable sides so it can be dismantled and reassembled. Remember you will want access to the best compost at the bottom of the bin
- Durable – Treated with preservative and robust design
- Size – Minimum 150 – 250 litres. Suitable for a small family garden
- Environmentally friendly – If made from wood it should come from an FSC source, and be treated with a non toxic preservative

Other Equipment

- Compost Fork
- Shredder
- Compost thermometer
- Kitchen Waste Container



Siting the Compost Bin

For convenience, site the compost bin either near to the source of the materials that will fill it or close to the place where the compost will finally be used. Good drainage is important and a bin placed directly onto the soil will have the benefit of soil micro-organisms for decomposition. Avoid a location with too much sun or wind. A warm spot with good air circulation is probably best.

Essential Ingredients for Making Compost

Organic material

- Green material such as leaves, grass cuttings, weeds, moss, non-woody plant material and wood ash.
- Brown materials such as bark, twigs, tough plant stems, dry roots, and shredded hedge trimmings and leaves
- Kitchen fruit and vegetable waste, cooked or uncooked, dead flowers, egg shells, coffee grounds, tea bags and small amounts of natural fabrics, paper and wood ash
- Vegetarian animal litter from horses, small pets and poultry, small amounts of bedding such as straw, hay or wood chippings, hair feathers and urine and seaweed



Moisture

Moisture helps decomposition. Dry materials take longer to compost. Conversely the natural bacteria and worms can't work well in waterlogged conditions and the compost will rot rather than decompose and it may then begin to smell. As a guide, if you squeeze a handful of compost water should not run off. If it does, add dry material to correct the balance. Alternatively if the compost is very dry add a bucket of water. A close fitting lid on top of the compost will help to maintain favourable conditions.

Air

Air is essential for the microbes and bacteria that develop naturally. They do the initial breaking down process before the worms take over and do the heavy work. Air tends to be compressed out during the initial stages when the compost reduces quite dramatically in volume. Aeration is best done by turning the compost in the early stages and incorporating air evenly through. This helps to give an evenly balanced result. Use a [pitchfork](#) to make the job easier.

Warmth

Composting begins with the action of naturally occurring microbes and bacteria. When they are active warmth builds up quickly. The volume of material drops and



the compost begins to compact. It is advisable to turn the compost at this stage to reintroduce air. The compost will then quickly reheat as before. Turning can be done a few times with benefit in the early stages of decomposition. A pitchfork makes the job easier. If the compost reaches a temperature of 150 Fahrenheit weeds and weed seeds will be destroyed. Heat occurs naturally only when soft green materials are present in the compost. If a quarter to a half of the bin contents are soft green material this should be sufficient to build up heat.

Time to mature

Once the compost bin is full and the contents have stopped shrinking quickly the compost can be left to mature. At this point you can start a new compost pile. In time the contents will become unrecognisable and the mixture will be ready for use. A big well-managed mixed pile can be ready for use in a few months. An unattended pile may take about a year.



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Gather together as much organic waste as possible and make a loose pile inside your compost bin. These organic materials will soon heat up and the composting process starts. The volume then quickly shrinks.

At this stage it is important to dig over the compost using a pitchfork, to introduce more air into the middle of the pile. This should be done a few times at the early stages, to avoid too much compaction.

The heat naturally generated quickly builds up again as the microbes resume composting in the improved conditions. The temperature will quickly reach around 150 degrees F in a large well-mixed pile. This will help destroy seeds, weeds and disease and the materials will decompose much faster.

Add more material until the pile is as big as the space will allow or the bin is full.

Check regularly. Compost should be moist to give the best results.

If it is dry add a bucket of water. If it is too wet, mix in some brown or dry material and cover to prevent more rain getting in. A well-balanced mixture of green and brown material gives good compost.

Once the compost bin is full and the contents have stopped shrinking the compost can be left to mature.

Hints & Tips

Material Size & Composition

The smaller the size of the material waste the faster it will compost. This is especially true for wood trimmings. The regular use of a shredder will speed up the process of decomposition of dry materials.

Also, composting works best when there is a good mix of materials. It is better to avoid putting in large quantities of one waste type unmixed.



Unsuitable Materials to Avoid

- Grease, fats and cooking oil
- Raw and cooked meats
- Nappies
- Coal, ash, soot
- Glass
- Plastic
- Metal
- Man-made fabrics
- Large amounts of paper
- Materials that have been treated with herbicide or pesticide
- Plants infested with persistent diseases
- Waste from pet dogs, cats, birds etc

Leaf composting

If you have large quantities of leaves they are best composted separately, as they can take about a year to decompose. Leaves are tough and tend to be dry, so they also benefit from a heavy shower, and will break down well in an open bin. Again composting leaves can be turned over with a pitchfork to mix and encourage even decomposition.

Grass

Grass has no structure and doesn't decompose well on its own and goes slimy. But when mixed with other compostable materials it will enrich the mixture.



Wood Trimmings & Tough Garden Waste

These materials have a tough texture and so compost more slowly. If you want to compost them, they will decompose faster if shredded into small pieces first.

Benefits of Modular Composting

The three-chambered compost bin that we produce is a very efficient and durable structure for fast composting. It works on an assembly line idea, having three batches of compost in varying degrees of decomposition. This gives easy access to a regular supply of uniform mature compost in rotation.

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