

MAKING GOOD COMPOST

The key to doing this is using a variety of materials when filling your bin and then a little bit of effort from you.

You can use these in your compost bin:

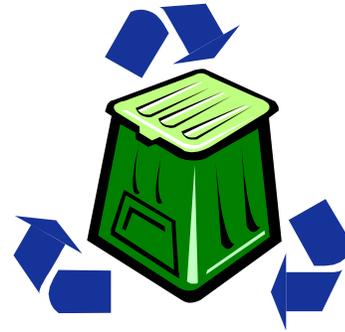
HIGH NITROGEN: Green garden leaves, coffee grounds, tea leaves, kitchen peelings, lawn clippings, blood and bone, chicken or other bird manures, rabbit/guinea pig manure, other organic fertilisers

HIGH CARBON: Newspaper, cardboard, egg cartons, toilet rolls, pizza cartons, straw, animal bedding, wood shavings (untreated wood), bark chips, old mulch, old potting mix, small twigs

START WITH

If you are composting in an open based bin, put the bin on bare soil.

1. At the base, place some **woody twigs or dried stems of plants**.
2. Next add a layer of the **high carbon** materials, about **20-30cm** deep.
3. You can then start to add your **kitchen peelings and scraps**.
4. Every week, you must add materials from the **High Carbon** list to your compost bin as well.



Repeat steps 3 and 4 until the bin is full, alternating the layers making sure the contents are not completely dry.

THEN, AT LEAST WEEKLY

Turn over the contents as much as you can, using an aerator or a garden fork. You might see steam rising from the contents as you mix them up and you will notice that the volume of the contents goes down as you turn over.
Repeat this every week.



WHEN TO STOP?

Filling a compost bin like this means that it is difficult to fill. You will need to decide when to stop filling it and leave it to finish breaking down, or decomposing. Keep turning it regularly but **DO NOT** add anything else to the bin.

You will need another compost bin to start the process once again.

IN A COUPLE OF MONTHS

Your compost should be ready. It should be sweet-smelling, or at least have no distinctly off-putting odour. It should be moist without being wet. You may see worms in your compost bin as well. Spread the compost over the soil and cover it with mulch. The worms will drag it through the soil for you as they munch their way through it – and your garden will love you!



SOLVING COMMON PROBLEMS WITH COLD COMPOSTING

Cold composting refers to simply adding only kitchen scraps, with the occasional addition of dry or carbon-based materials. It can lead to the following problems if not looked after regularly.

WHY IS MY COMPOST...

- left with half-decomposed big lumps?

Adding smaller pieces to the bin should ensure that it all decomposes evenly. Avoid avocado seeds, pineapple tops, large twigs or woody items unless they can be crushed or chopped before adding. Crush eggshells. Cut up garden prunings.

- smelly?

This could be due to too much nitrogen-containing materials (green stuff, usually too many kitchen scraps) and not enough carbon (brown or dry stuff). Adding more of the dry stuff in the form of crumpled newspaper, old straw, torn up egg cartons or dried autumn leaves will help. Generally, after a week of adding kitchen fruit and veg peelings, you will need to add 3 times the volume of dry stuff to get the balance right.

TURNING the contents will also help with minimising smells. Use a garden fork or special compost tool to aerate the heap at least weekly and this will accelerate the compost making.

- taking SO long to do anything?

This could be because:

- The contents could be too dry. *Add water, preferably with some high in nitrogen compost activator added at the same time (eg blood and bone, Dynamic Lifter, loads of coffee grounds).*
- The contents could be too wet and slimy. *See above for solution.*
- It is decomposing unevenly. *Turn the contents over to introduce air (oxygen) into the mix.*

- crawling with ants and slaters?

This means that the heap is too dry. Use a watering can to thoroughly wet the contents without saturating them. Turn the contents over so that the drier edges get wet evenly. Ants and slaters (and the many other insects that are in your compost) are not harmful but they do indicate that your compost will not decompose rapidly enough.

- plagued with rats/mice/blowflies/maggots?

Cooked and processed foods attract vermin and the heat from your compost makes a welcoming place for rats and mice to nest. Don't add any cooked scraps, especially bread, cakes, cheeses, fish or meat. Rats and mice usually enter the bin by digging underneath, so fasten a piece of fine-meshed wire under the bin before filling it; or get a hungry cat! Alternatively, use a fully enclosed bin such as the Aerobin or any of the rotating bins.

Compost in a Bag

Gather wet autumn leaves, fill up a plastic garbage bag and close the end. Leave it for a year and then use the resulting "leaf mulch" around young seedlings for a nutritious mulch around them. To speed up the process, shake a good handful of blood and bone through at the same time and put it where sunlight will heat the bag. Just make sure the contents are thoroughly wet at the start.



A good vegie garden requires regular top-ups with great soil conditioner and the BEST is your own good home-made compost.

Compost Tea

Fill a large bucket (20 litres or more) to about half full with finished compost. Top up with water. Stir daily. After a week, take some out and strain the bits out of it so it doesn't clog your watering can. Dilute to the colour of weak tea and use this as a liquid feed for fast growing vegetables. Keep topping up the original bucket with more water until the compost tea is too weak and then get some fresh compost in there.

If you have any old mesh bags or a hessian sack, fill these with the compost and dangle them into the bucket, just like a teabag!