



Composting in Small Spaces

What is compost and why is it good?



- Compost is a nutrient-rich, dark, and crumbly material that is produced through the decomposition of organic matter, such as food scraps, yard waste, and other biodegradable materials. This decomposition process is facilitated by microorganisms like bacteria, fungi, and worms, breaking down the organic matter into a humus-like substance. Compost is often used as a natural fertilizer and soil amendment in gardening and agriculture due to its ability to improve soil structure, retain moisture, and provide essential nutrients to plants.
- We all know that composting is a 'good' thing. It keeps organic materials out of landfill, thereby reducing the production of Methane (which is much more destructive to the climate than Carbon dioxide). However, it also makes good economic sense: any food you don't eat this time around, you can compost and use to grow more food, giving you a second chance to get value out of what you've paid for.

Brown stuff and Green stuff

- High-Carbon stuff is things like dead leaves, straw, cardboard and shredded paper.
- High Nitrogen materials includes Kitchen scraps, green leaves, fresh grass and weeds, and animal manures (especially bird poo)
- Compost too dry and brown? –add more green stuff (and maybe some water)
- Compost too wet, slimy and stinky? – add more brown stuff.



Other stuff:

- **Moisture:** If it's too dry, then microorganisms such as fungi, and invertebrates like worms and insects can't do their job. Too wet and they drown.
- **Temperature:** In a large enough pile, the compost produces and retains its own heat.
- **Oxygen:** if your compost is too compacted and too wet, air can't circulate: Turn it or fork it around a bit. Adding in some coarser materials such as twigs, helps with aeration.
- **pH:** Too acidic or too alkaline? Whether this is an actual problem will usually depend on the pH of your garden soil.



Common problems and Solutions

- ***It smells!** -Not true: a properly running compost system should smell pleasingly earthy. The most common reason for smell is that the system is too wet or contains too much 'green stuff' and not enough 'brown stuff' and not enough air is getting in.
- ***It attracts creepy-crawlies!** -Some insects and other little creatures are a normal part of composting: slaters and worms help break down the compost for you and increase the ration of good microorganisms. The little vinegar flies zipping about when you open the lid are also part of the process. They are not the destructive fruit flies that we get in warmer parts of Australia (although, they are close relatives with some really cool biological characteristics).
- ***It attracts rats and mice!** If you turn or move your compost bin and see little mousies running around, your compost is too dry. They can't live and breed in a properly damp (but not wet) compost pile.
- *** Everything goes mouldy!** -Well, Der! That's the whole idea: microscopic plants, animals and fungi consuming the waste and growing: exactly what happens on the forest floor.
- Meat and Dairy, dead Animals, wire mesh.

So, what do I do with all this lovely compost?



<https://cultivatedelight.com/>

Methods for Small Spaces



- **For Outdoors, including balconies:**

- Worm farm.
- Worm café
- Compost tea
- Split tumbler

- **For Indoors:**

- Bokashi
- Electric composter
- **Alternative actions:**
- Friendly neighbours
- Green waste recycling bins
- Rise-up and start a Revolution, take control of the Body Corporate, Free the workers, set-up communal composting system, make the Bourgeoisie wheely-bins obsolete.



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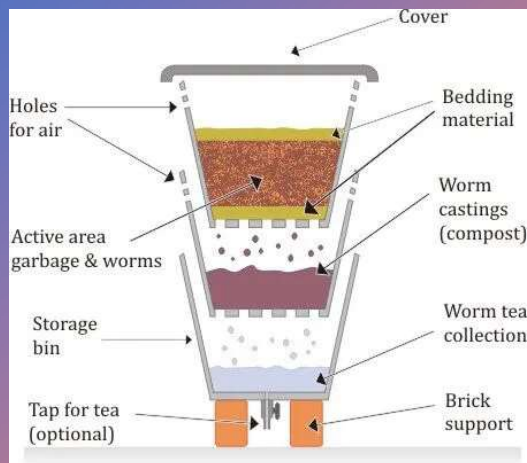
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Worm farms and Worm 'cafes'

- Worm farms are relatively simple to set-up and operate.
- You start with some bedding material (usually cocopeat), and some composting worms (garden worms can't cope with all that organic matter). You can obtain worms from nurseries, and even via post. The best way to obtain them though, is to get a nice big handful of them from a friend who has a thriving population, along with some of their worm castings to help them settle in, provide beneficial microorganisms and already have plenty of worm eggs ready to hatch.
- Worms like things damp, but not wet, cool and dark
- Feed the small amounts at first, until the population gets established
- The 'Worm-wee' that makes it way down through the structure is amazing stuff for weekly feeding of gardens and pot plants, but it must be first be diluted to the colour of weak tea or it will be too powerful.
- The crumbly soil-like mass left over as the worms migrate into new layers, can be added directly as a top-dressing in pots and beds, or even used as a substitute for seed raising and potting mixes.
- 'Worm cafes' as they are often called, work in a similar way, but consist of a tube with many holes, sunk into a bed or large pot. The worms enter, feeding on scraps and then carrying the nutrients back out into the soil.



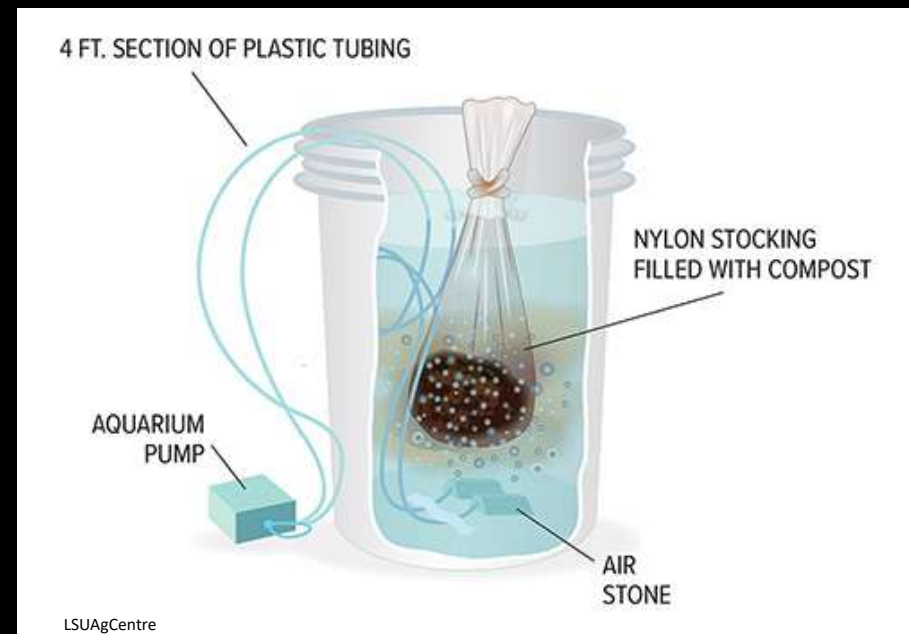
Working-worms.com

Compost teas, Stockpiling & Tumblers

- Compost tea is made by decomposing organic matter, such as scraps and weeds, submerged in a lidded bucket of water until rotted away. The resulting liquid is diluted before applying. This method is great for annoying weeds and seeds which tend to keep growing in normal compost. The bucket may go through a smelly stage but having air bubbling through the liquid via a fishtank aerator, will greatly reduce this.
- Compost tumblers make great compost, but you will need a bin or bucket to store scraps as you need to make one full bin at a time. If you keep adding scraps, it will never be finished.



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Bokashi

- Bokashi uses effective microorganisms to ferment organic waste in an anaerobic environment. This method allows you to compost a wide array of food waste in sealed containers, including meat, citrus, dairy, and processed foods.
- **Pros:** Effective when done properly. The (diluted) liquid produced makes an excellent plant food
- **Cons:** you have to keep paying for the bokashi enzymes.
- **Or do you?** - Inoculate your own Bokashi bran:
- For those of you who make your own yoghurt or sourdough at home, you will find the method quite similar:
- Mix together three parts ordinary generic wheat bran with one-part brown sugar or molasses with a good handful of the expensive bokashi stuff you bought (or some homemade stuff from your last batch). Add enough water to make it quite damp: if you squeeze a handful of it, no more than a drop or two of water should come out. Pack it very firmly into a lidded container, seal and leave in a shady spot for a month or more.
- This can also be used as an Activator in any other compost system



tomsnotebook.com

Electric composters

- Possibly the illicit Love Child of a Bokashi Bucket and a Breadmaker, Electric composters use heat, grinding attachments and aeration to dry and grind your scraps into little bits that are nutrient rich but not 'alive and kicking' like real compost.
- They use electricity and use plastic 'carbon filters' to trap odours.



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Alternative actions

Friendly neighbors.

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Green waste recycling bins

Rise-up and start a Revolution, take control of the Body Corporate, Free the workers, set-up communal composting system, make the Bourgeoisie wheely-bins obsolete.



Cut the bottom out of a bucket and drill some holes around the bottom.

The worm tower is buried under a lemon tree. The holes let worms pass in and out.

Pet waste.

Don't worry; this isn't about trying to take some poo for a walk

- If you have cats or dogs, their waste can be safely composted in a completely separate system, similar to worm cafes we looked at earlier.
- Bury a bottomless, hole-drilled bucket at the base of a tree (citrus trees are ideal) and start a worm colony in it. The worms will take the nutrients out into the soil and feed the tree.
- cover the bucket with a tile or paver.
- The contents should never be removed or handled. Not suitable for pots; in-ground only.
- Kitty litter made from biodegradable materials, such as paper, can also be added .
- If the system gets a bit wet or smelly, add carbon such as dry lawn clippings.
- If you have larger quantities of poo, you may have to cycle between 2 or 3 bucket systems.
- Paper liners from the bottom of the Budgie cage, can be rolled up, poop, seeds and all, and buried in regular compost set-ups.
- Rabbit and Guinea pig bedding and waste can be safely composted or even added directly to beds and pots