

How to Compost at Home

Composting is a natural process in which micro-organisms convert organic waste such as leaves, vegetable peeling, grass clippings and paper into a rich soil conditioner.

What are the benefits of composting?

Composting is a simple, cost effective and natural way to recycle your organic kitchen and garden waste. When compost is used on your garden the end result is an improvement in the nutrient levels of the soil, as well as to the soil structure. It also prevents erosion and improves the water holding capacity of your soil. Home composting also reduces the amount of organic waste going to landfill.

Principles to making a good compost

Making useable compost is easy; all the hard work is done by micro-organisms. The key to composting is to keep the micro-organisms that process the organic waste healthy – they need food, air, moisture and warmth (just like us).

Browns



Browns are carbon rich materials such as paper, sawdust, straw, leaves, cereal boxes, cardboard, napkins, paper towels, tree clippings, vacuum cleaner dust, egg shells, woody materials and wood ash (materials that are tough and dry).

Greens



Greens are nitrogen rich materials such as raw uncooked kitchen scraps and vegetable peelings, tea bags and leaves, coffee grounds, grass clippings, soft garden debris, sheep or horse manure (materials that are high in moisture and rot away quickly).

Moisture



Your compost should be moist like a wrung out sponge. If you find the compost is too dry add a little water. If it is too wet add some of the dry 'brown' materials listed above.

Air



Like all living creatures that breathe oxygen, aerobic micro-organisms need air to live. It is important to allow air into the compost. You can do this by adding scrunched up or shredded paper, egg cartons, toilet paper rolls or dry twigs to create air pockets, or dig over your compost using a garden fork to encourage air circulation.

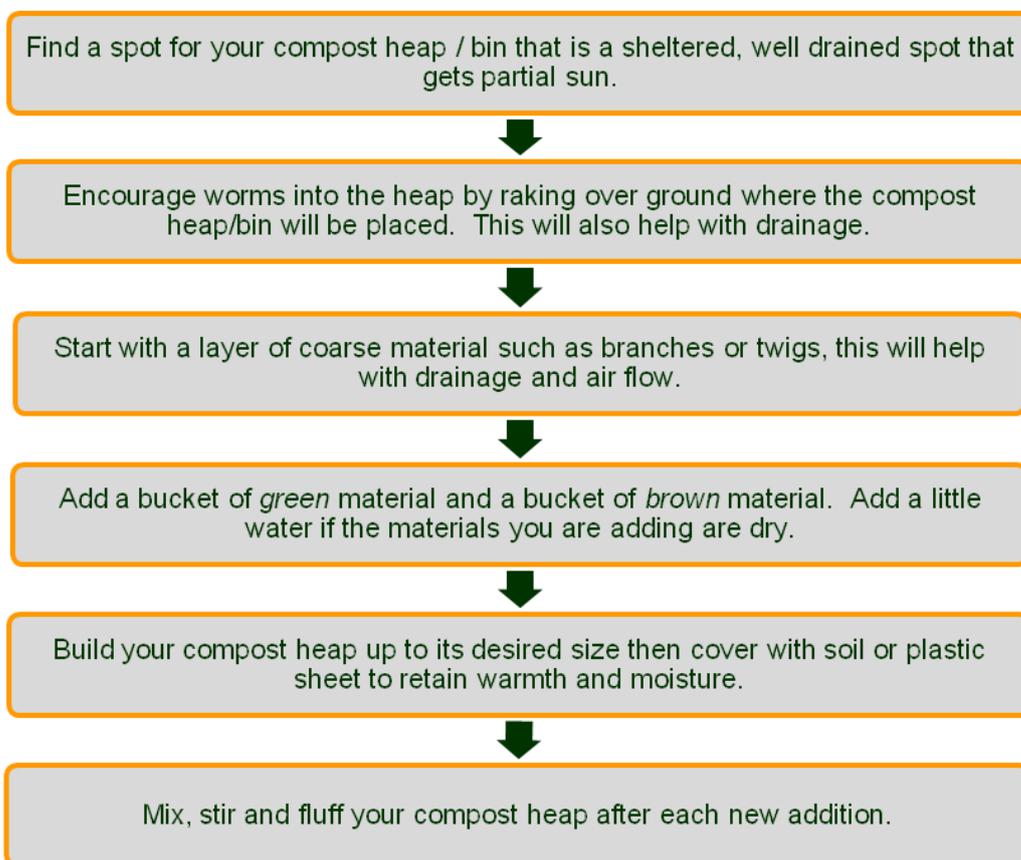
What should NOT be put into your compost

- ✗ Meat
- ✗ Grease
- ✗ Fat
- ✗ Bones
- ✗ Cooked food (may attract vermin)
- ✗ Weeds
- ✗ Dairy
- ✗ Oil
- ✗ Treated wood
- ✗ Non-organic material

Cat and dog faeces are not recommended as they can cause odour problems, may contain parasites and there is little nutrient value in them.

Compost can be made in a simple free standing pile on the ground or you can create compost in a bin or container. You can make a compost bin yourself at little or no cost from wood, bricks, concrete blocks or any other suitable recyclable material. Commercial compost bins are available for purchase at your local hardware or gardening stores. The Council has subsidised compost options available to residents, go to the Council's website for more information.

Follow these easy steps to make your own home compost:



Within a couple of days of creating your compost heap it should begin to heat up. This will be the beginning of the composting process. Regular turning of the compost heap is an important part of making good compost.

Did you know?

Compost can:

- **Suppress plant diseases and pests**
- **Reduce or eliminate the need for chemical fertilisers**
- **Promote higher yields of agricultural crops¹**

¹ <http://www.epa.gov/epawaste/conservation/rrr/composting/basic.htm>

Turning your compost

For the best composting results you should turn your compost heap once every 4 to 6 weeks. Turning should be done in a manner that allows all the material from the sides to be moved into the centre. Turning your compost regularly should reduce the time to produce useable compost from 6 to 12 months to only 4 to 6 months, depending on climatic conditions and the size and composition of your compost heap.

Using your compost

Your compost is ready when it looks like potting mix (dark brown in colour with an earthy smell). It may be a bit lumpier than the potting mix you buy from your local gardening store with bits of twig and egg shells in it but, do not worry it will still be just as effective. Simply sieve out the larger items and return them to the compost heap for further processing.

Here are some tips on how to use your compost:

- ✓ Potting Mix
- ✓ Lawns
- ✓ Trees and Shrubs
- ✓ Mulch
- ✓ Vegetable Gardens
- ✓ Garden Beds

Important Health Information

Both compost and soil contain living organisms that have from time to time been associated with allergies and illness in humans (generally people who suffer from compromised immune systems or respiratory illness). It is therefore important to take the following precautions when handling soil or compost:

- Wash your hands after handling soil or compost;
- Protect broken skin by wearing gloves;
- Avoid confined spaces for handling soil or compost;
- Keep compost moist to prevent spores and dust problems; and
- Wear a facemask when handling soil or compost if you suffer from allergies or a depressed immune system.²

Want more information?

For further information on home composting try your local library or try searching the internet. Here are a few websites to get you started:

Reduce Your Rubbish: <http://www.reducerubbish.govt.nz/>

Sustainability.govt.nz: <http://www.sustainability.govt.nz/>

Sustainable Gardening Australia: <http://www.sgaonline.org.au/>

² http://www.resourcesmart.vic.gov.au/documents/composting_guide.pdf