

# What is compost?

Gardeners love compost – but what is it and what is it for?

Compost is like a health supplement for your soil. It conditions and enriches garden soil, bringing it to life by acting as a beacon to beneficial organisms such as earthworms.

It's easy to make your own, using food scraps and leftovers, garden clippings, and more.

All the hard work is done by microscopic organisms, worms, and natural processes that break everything down into a rich, dark, soil-like material to boost your garden.

You can buy compost, but it's cheap, easy, and fun to make your own.

It just takes a little effort and a little know-how.

Let's get started!



## Helpful hints

- Egg shells will break down better if you crush them
- To keep rats and mice at bay:
  - ▶ Bury food that might attract them deep inside the heap
  - ▶ Keep the heap damp – they won't nest in a damp heap
- To compost noxious weeds, such as oxalis (wood sorrel), put them in a plastic bag and leave in the sun for several weeks before adding them to your heap.

## Just right

Remember, your heap should be:

- Not too dry
- Not too wet
- Damp is just right!



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# — A guide to — home composting



# Setting up

## Find your bin

Compost bins come in many types and sizes and can be as simple or complex as you like.

- Build your own timber-framed boxes
- Reuse a large plastic bin
- Wrap netting around stakes and line with cardboard or newspaper.



DIY not your thing? Buy one – there's a huge range available.



## Choose your site

Your compost heap should sit directly on the soil. The site should be level with good drainage and not be too sunny.

You'll need easy access to the bin, including with a hose.

Before starting your heap, work the ground over with a fork – this will help earthworms and other organisms find it and move in.

# Make compost happen

Build your heap layer by layer:

1. Make a layer of twigs, sticks or other coarse material for drainage and ventilation – about 15 centimetres deep.
2. Add a variety of compostable materials from our composting menu (a couple of buckets full).
3. Add a little water if the materials are dry.
4. Keep layering as above to the size you want
5. Mix, stir and fluff it up after every few layers
6. Cover the heap
  - a. Open heap or bin – cover with straw, soil, old sacks, old carpet, thick cardboard, or similar
  - b. Enclosed bin – fit the lid
7. Wait – in a few days it will heat up and start to shrink.

**Congratulations – you've made composting happen!**

8. Turn the material in your heap or bin at least once every four to six weeks.

## Tips for tip-top compost

As your compost gradually breaks down, you need to keep it well fed, aired and watered, to ensure you get a good amount of compost to use on your garden.

- Frequently add a variety of material.
- Lightly water – it shouldn't be dry or drenched, so aim for damp.
- Turn, turn, turn – use a fork to turn the composting material at least once a month.

# Menu for a great compost

## On the menu

### Food waste

- ✓ Vegetable scraps/ peelings
- ✓ Fruit scraps/peelings
- ✓ Tea leaves
- ✓ Coffee grounds
- ✓ Egg shells

### Garden waste

- ✓ Lawn clippings
- ✓ Soft hedge/bush trimmings
- ✓ Soft debris (petals, leaves)
- ✓ Woody material

### Paper products

- ✓ Paper
- ✓ Cardboard (cereal boxes etc)
- ✓ Paper towels
- ✓ Tissues
- ✓ Paper serviettes/napkins

### Animal waste

- ✓ Hair
- ✓ Fur
- ✓ Claw/nail clippings
- ✓ Sheep/horse/goat manure
- ✓ Bedding hay/straw

### Other materials

- ✓ Wood ash (untreated)
- ✓ Sawdust (untreated)
- ✓ Vacuum cleaner dust

## Off the menu

### Food waste

- ✗ Meat and fish
- ✗ Bones
- ✗ Fats and oils
- ✗ Dairy products (yoghurt/ cheese, etc)

### Garden waste

- ✗ Diseased plant material
- ✗ Plant material with chemical spray residue
- ✗ Weeds (twitch, oxalis, convolvulus, dock, dandelion)

### Paper products

- ✗ Wax/plastic coated paper
- ✗ Wax/plastic coated cardboard

### Animal waste

- ✗ Dog poo
- ✗ Cat poo

### Other materials

- ✗ Timber/wood
- ✗ Plastic
- ✗ Glass
- ✗ Metal