

# Easy Composting

## 4 easy steps to great compost

### 1 Choosing the site

The ideal location for a compost has good drainage and is well shaded in summer.

Composting is natural and inexpensive.

It's great for soil and the garden.

### 2 What to compost

Compost is a mix of different materials:

- nitrogen rich kitchen organics such as fruit and vegetable peelings and green garden organics such as fresh grass clippings, green leaves and weeds and manure



- nitrogen poor brown garden organics such as dry leaves, woody twigs, paper and straw
- moisture – dry materials won't compost



Adding some soil or completed compost will introduce the micro-organisms that recycle our leftovers into rich, soil-like compost.

#### Hints:

- Keep a bucket with a well-sealed lid in the kitchen to collect food scraps.
- Use the lawn mower to chop up coarse garden prunings.

### 4 Maintaining your compost

It is important to add air to the compost so it doesn't smell. This can be done by occasionally turning it with a garden fork or by placing garden stakes or pipes through the heap to allow air in.

**Hint:** Don't let the compost get too wet, cover your heap – it should be just moist, not wet. If you have a wet or saturated compost heap, mix more dry brown garden organics through it, or turn it.

**Worm farms** are a great alternative for people in flats or small blocks.



### What you can compost

Anything that was once a plant or animal can be composted, including – fruit and vegetable peelings, newspapers, grass clippings, weeds, tea leaves, coffee grounds, egg shells, old potting mix, dead flowers, human and animal hair.



**Hint:** Avoid placing meat or dairy products in your compost until you are confident and experienced.

### 3 Layering

To build the compost, start with a thick layer (15cm) of twigs or coarse mulch at the base for drainage. Then follow the easy A,B,C formula to build a heap layer upon layer.

**A.** Thin layer of kitchen organics and green garden organics.

**B.** Cover with a layer of brown garden organics ensuring no food waste is left exposed.

**C.** Moisten well. Then repeat A,B,C.



**Hint:** A sprinkling of soil or finished compost layered on top of food scraps will make a richer compost and help minimise odours.

In just 8 weeks your compost should be ready to use!

### How to use compost



Use sifted compost for potting mix and seed raising mix (woody leftovers can be used for mulch or composted again).



Encourage healthy plant growth by mulching around trees with compost (not next to trunk).

← Drip Line



Compost can be applied twice a year to natives and sifted compost can be used as a top dressing for lawns.

## The easy compost **fix-it** guide!

Composting is like baking a cake – sometimes the recipe doesn't work, or the cake won't rise.

As composting is a natural process, it doesn't take much to work out the problem and take some simple steps to fix it.

Some common compost problems and their solutions are listed below:

### Good for the environment!

By turning your food and garden waste into compost you can make a difference to our environment, by –

- reducing the amount of waste you dispose
- reducing the use of artificial fertilisers
- improving your local soil quality
- creating a more natural, healthier (and happier) place to live.



### Smelly compost?

Your compost can start to smell if it gets too wet or if there is not enough air in the heap. A common cause is putting in too much food waste and not enough dry ingredients.

**Fix it!** Fork in dry leaves or garden mulch. Garden lime, dolomite or woodfire ash added to the heap will also 'sweeten' it (lime reduces the acidity caused by excessive nitrogen-rich materials.)

Turn the compost to get more air in.

Combine nitrogen-rich ingredients with sawdust or shredded newspaper before adding to the heap.

Give your compost heap a 'floor' of planks to ensure good drainage.



### Unwelcome visitors?

Ants, cockroaches, mice or rats can sometimes make your compost their home.

Do not despair, there are millions of friendly creatures in your compost heap and some simple methods can get rid of the unwelcome ones.

**Fix it!** Always ensure food in the heap is covered with a layer of green organics – then cover heap with underfelt, hessian or polythene plastic sheet. Turning the heap discourages ants and cockroaches. Placing fine wire under the compost bin or heap will help keep out mice and rats. Avoid placing dairy products, meat and seafood in the compost.



### Compost slow to mature?

If your composting system can't keep up with demand there are ways to make great compost quicker. A slow composting system can mean that the compost is not hot enough, or there may not be enough air or water.

**Fix it!** Adding nitrogen-rich material, such as kitchen organics or green garden organics can speed up the composting process. Turn the heap and add water. Cover the compost with insulating material in winter if it gets too cold.

There are many good publications on composting. Try your local library or phone the Department of Environment and Conservation (NSW) on 131 555

### Did you know?

About **half** of what we throw into the garbage bin is food and garden waste!

Mixed with the rest of our garbage the potential of these organic materials is lost – they are usually wasted in landfills where they contribute to environmental problems like the greenhouse effect and water pollution.

Compost bins and worms farms are available from some **local councils**.