

COMPOST BIN

A guide to
successfully
setting it up

Composting will allow you to create wonderfully rich soil supplement to help your plants grow. As you will soon find out, composting is all about maintaining a balance of organic waste, water and air. Follow the simple steps below to set a successful compost bin at home.

How to get started

1. Select a flat location in your garden that is shady in summer and has good drainage. **Bury the bin at least 10cm** into the soil to keep pests out. You can also cover the base with a layer of fine wire mesh to prevent mice and rats getting in.
2. Place a **first layer of shredded newspapers, egg cartons, dry leaves and/or small twigs**. This will ensure good aeration in the compost.
3. Add activators such as **compost from an old heap, animal manure, blood meal and/or organically rich garden soil**. These activators contain composting bacteria and will help start the composting process.
4. Add water.
5. Alternate between thin layers of **'brown' and 'green' layers**. Try to add two parts of 'brown' materials for each part of 'green'. Add water as needed to keep the compost moist.
6. Use an aerator to **turn your compost every one to two weeks** to speed up breakdown.
7. Keep an eye on your compost and make sure it's not too dry or too wet. Refer to the table on page 3 if you have any problems.
8. Keep adding layers of 'brown' and 'green' materials until your bin is full.
9. Once your compost is **dark and rich with a crumbly and smooth texture that smells earthy and woody**, it's ready to use! Compost is a great soil conditioner that adds lots of nutrients and helps your garden retain moisture.



What can you put in your compost bin?

What was once alive can be composted. However, you should avoid adding meat, fats, oil, dairy and pet poo to keep pests and parasites away.

Here is a guide of 'brown' and 'green' materials that can be composted. As a simple rule, add more 'brown' materials than 'green'.

BROWN MATERIALS



Rich in carbon with a low moisture content.

- ✓ Dried leaves
- ✓ Dried garden prunings
- ✓ Egg cartons
- ✓ Dried and fresh grass clippings
- ✓ Newspapers and paper products
- ✓ Straw and sawdust

GREEN MATERIALS



Rich in nitrogen with a high moisture content.

- ✓ Fruit and veggie scraps
- ✓ Coffee grounds
- ✓ Tea leaves
- ✓ Food scraps (avoid meat and dairy)
- ✓ Dead cut flowers

Hot versus cold composting

Hot compost

If you already have lots of organic materials to compost, you can fill up your bin with layers of 'brown' and 'green' all at once. By doing so, it should heat up in the middle to create 'hot compost'. Hot compost will break down fast and kills weed seeds, but don't add worms in there as it's too hot for them!

Cold compost

Cold compost happens when you add layers of 'brown' and 'green' gradually. Weed seeds won't be killed but worms will happily live in there as well as a bunch of other beneficial critters. So don't panic if you have worms, slaters, beetles, and vinegar flies– they are part of your compost ecosystem.

Get familiar with your compost – get to know it and read its moods. It will become easier and easier to know what it wants. And don't worry, it's totally normal that the finished product doesn't look as homogenous as commercial compost. Each thing in the compost will breakdown at different speed – chunks in your compost are normal!

To learn more about how to solve common composting problems, check the table below.

Troubleshooting

| Problem | Cause | Solution |
|-------------------------|--|---|
| Pests | Flies/maggots: inappropriate ingredients. | Avoid meat and dairy. Make sure the lid is secure. Cover food scraps and maggots with a layer of soil. |
| | Rats/mice: inappropriate ingredients. | Make sure the bin is dug into the soil. Add fine wire mesh at the base. Avoid meat and dairy. Make sure the lid is secure. Cover food scraps with a layer of soil. |
| | Cockroaches: too acidic, anaerobic (without oxygen). | Turn the compost to aerate. Add garden lime to raise the pH back up to neutral. |
| | Ants: too dry. | Add water and green materials. Ensure the materials are moist. |
| Smelly compost | Too much water. Too much 'green' materials. Poor drainage or lack of aeration. | Add more brown materials to absorb moisture. For a quick fix, add garden lime and turn (aerate) the heap. |
| Just not working | Balance of ingredients is not right. Mix is too dry. | Make sure you have the right mix of green and brown materials and the right moisture. Turn your heap and water it to ensure it is evenly moist. To speed up the process, add more green ingredients and activators. |

To learn more about composting and subsidised equipment, visit:

canning.wa.gov.au/compostingequipment