

COMPOSTING AT HOME

A quick and easy guide to composting at home and using your finished compost



 **recycle**
compost at home

CONTENTS

Composting is easy: A step by step guide	4
Making good compost: Put these in and keep these out	6
Getting the compost out of the bin	9
Using your compost	10
Helpful accessories	15
Making the perfect leafmould	16
FAQs	18

Composting is an inexpensive, natural process that transforms your kitchen and garden waste into a valuable and nutrient rich food for your garden. It's easy to make and to use. This guide will show you how to get started and provide you with useful tips on how to use your finished compost.

FEED YOUR BIN, NOT LANDFILL – WHY COMPOST AT HOME?

Do your bit to reduce the amount of waste sent to landfill. Even for households that are already composting, new research has found that almost half of the food waste in their rubbish bins could have been put in the compost bin.

Did you know, composting at home for just one year can save global warming gases equivalent to all the CO₂ your kettle produces annually, or your washing machine produces in 3 months?

We're often asked "Why do I need to compost when my waste will break down in landfill anyway?" When waste is sent to landfill, air cannot get to the organic waste. Therefore as the waste breaks down it creates a harmful greenhouse gas, methane, which damages the Earth's atmosphere. However, when this same waste is composted above ground at home, oxygen helps the waste to decompose aerobically which means no methane is produced, which is good news for the planet. And what's more, after nine to twelve months, you get a free fertiliser for your garden and plant pots to keep them looking beautiful.

"Just like you I am keen to do my bit for the environment and at the same time help my garden. All you need to do is follow the advice in this guide and you too can get the best out of your bin and start giving Mother Nature that helping hand" *Philippa Forrester*



COMPOSTING IS EASY: A STEP BY STEP GUIDE



1. Find the right site

Ideally site your compost bin in a reasonably sunny site on bare soil. If you have to put your compost bin on concrete, tarmac or patio slabs ensure there's a layer of paper and twigs or existing compost on the bottom so the worms and other creatures can colonise. Choose a place where you can easily add ingredients to the bin and get the compost out.

2. Add the right ingredients

Have a container available such as a kitchen caddy or old ice cream tub so that you can collect items for your compost bin from all over the house. Fill your kitchen caddy or container with everything from vegetable and fruit peelings to teabags, toilet roll tubes, cereal boxes and eggshells. Take care not to compost cooked food, meat or fish. See page 6 for more information on how to make good compost.



3. Fill it up

Empty your kitchen caddy along with your garden waste into your compost bin. A 50/50 mix of greens and browns (see pages 6 and 7) is the perfect recipe for good compost.

4. Wait a while

It takes between nine and twelve months for your compost to become ready for use, so now all you need to do is wait and let nature do the work. Keep on adding greens and browns to top up your compost.

5. Ready for use

Once your compost has turned into a crumbly, dark material, resembling thick, moist soil and gives off an earthy, fresh aroma, you know it's ready to use.



6. Removing the compost

Lift the bin slightly or open the hatch at the bottom and scoop out the fresh compost with a garden fork, spade or trowel. See page 9 for a guide to getting your compost out of the bin.

7. Use it

Don't worry if your compost looks a little lumpy with twigs and bits of eggshells – this is perfectly normal. Use it to enrich borders and vegetable patches, plant up patio containers or feed the lawn.



MAKING GOOD COMPOST

The key to good compost lies in getting the mix right. You need to keep your greens and browns properly balanced. If your compost is too wet and gives off an odour, add more browns. If it's too dry and is not rotting, add some greens. Air is essential to the composting process and by mixing material up, as you fill your bin, it will create air pockets and help keep your compost healthy.

PUT THESE IN

Like any recipe, your compost relies on the right ingredients to make it work. Good things you can compost include vegetable peelings, fruit waste, teabags, plant prunings and grass cuttings. These are considered "greens." Greens are quick to rot and they provide important nitrogen and moisture. Other things you can compost include cardboard egg boxes, scrunched up paper and small twigs. These are considered "browns" and are slower to rot. They provide fibre and carbon and also allow important air pockets to form in the mixture. Crushed eggshells can be included to add useful minerals.



'Greens'

- Tea bags
- Grass cuttings
- Vegetable peelings, salad leaves and fruit scraps
- Old flowers and nettles
- Coffee grounds and filter paper
- Spent bedding plants
- Rhubarb leaves
- Young annual weeds (e.g. chickweed)

'Browns'

- Crushed egg shells
- Egg and cereal boxes
- Corrugated cardboard and paper (scrunched up)
- Toilet and kitchen roll tubes
- Garden prunings
- Twigs and hedge clippings
- Straw and hay
- Bedding from vegetarian pets
- Ashes from wood, paper and lumpwood charcoal
- Sawdust and wood chippings
- Wool
- Woody clippings
- Cotton threads and string (made from natural fibre)
- Feathers
- Vacuum bag contents
- Old natural fibre clothes (cut into small pieces)
- Tissues, paper towels and napkins
- Shredded confidential documents
- Corn cobs and stalks

KEEP THESE OUT

Certain things should never be placed in your bin. Do not put in...

- Cooked vegetables
- Meat
- Dairy products
- Diseased plants
- Dog poo or cat litter, or baby's nappies.

Putting these in your bin can encourage unwanted pests and can also create odour. Also avoid composting perennial weeds (such as dandelions and thistles) or weeds with seed heads. Remember that plastics, glass and metals are not suitable for composting and should be recycled separately.



FINALLY, YOUR COMPOST IS READY FOR USE!

The time for putting that finished compost to use has arrived. Before starting you'll want to find out if it actually is ready to go. You can do this by making sure your compost is dark brown and smells nice and earthy. It should also be slightly moist and have a crumbly texture.



It probably won't look exactly like the compost you buy at the shops and it's very likely that yours will still have twigs and eggshells in it! Don't worry... it's still perfectly good to use! Simply sift out any larger bits and return them to your compost bin.

Your fresh compost is nutrient-rich food for your garden and will help improve soil structure, maintain moisture levels, and keep your soil's PH balance in check while helping suppress plant disease. It has everything your plants need including nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium and it will help buffer soils that are very acidic or alkaline. Compost improves your soil's condition and your plants and flowers will love it!



GETTING THE COMPOST OUT OF THE BIN



STEP 1

Remove the hatch at the bottom of the compost bin to see if the compost is ready. Finished compost should be dark brown, crumbly and moist with a nice earthy smell. It is likely that it will still have twigs and eggshells in it. If you only need a small amount of compost for potting purposes, then the hatch provides perfect access to remove a small amount with a trowel.



STEP 2

If you need lots of compost then it is best to remove the whole compost bin. To separate and loosen the material from the edges of the bin, push the bin backwards and forwards in a rocking motion. Lift the bin up and off. The contents will remain in situ, the bin itself acting a bit like a jelly mould. To make this easier it is a good idea to remove the hatch from the bottom completely so you can get a good grip on the bin.



STEP 3

There are other compost bins available with different ways to access the finished compost. If you have a Komp250 bin the front and sides of this bin are easily removable to provide access to finished compost.



STEP 4

Once you have removed the bin you will be left with a 'compost cake'. You should have a plentiful supply of finished compost at the bottom, a middle layer of partially rotted material and your most recently added items at the top.



STEP 5

Using a garden fork remove the top layers into a wheelbarrow – you can then add these back into the bin to continue rotting down for next year's compost.



STEP 6

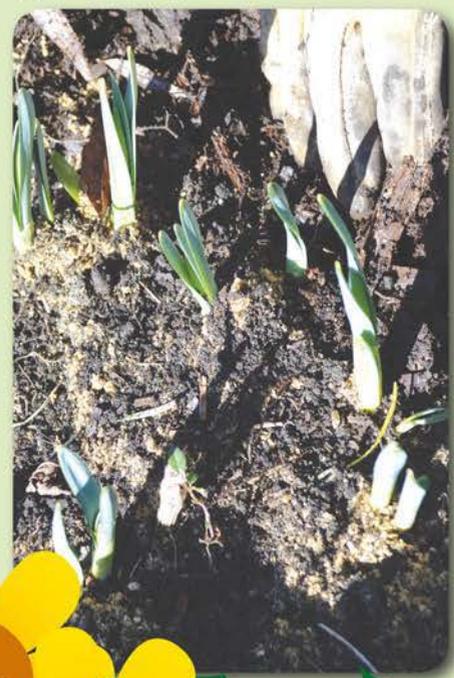
If you don't need to use all of your finished compost, you can bag it up for future use – you can store finished compost for up to a year. Old plastic sand bags are great for storing finished compost. Don't forget to always wear gloves when handling compost.

USING YOUR COMPOST

...on flowerbeds

Help your new plants and flowers bloom by digging a 10cm layer of compost into the soil prior to planting.

If your flowers have already been planted you simply need to spread a thin layer of compost-enriched soil around the base of the plants. Nutrients will work their way down to the roots and your plants will enjoy the healthy boost compost provides. It is important that you leave gaps around any soft stemmed plants.



...to enrich new borders

The borders of your garden will also greatly appreciate your compost.

Spread up to a 5cm layer of compost over the existing soil. Worms will quickly like getting to work mixing it in for you! Otherwise you can dig your finished compost into the soil prior to planting. It is important that you leave gaps around any soft stemmed plants.



...as mulch

Using your compost as mulch is a great idea.

By using 'rough' compost (where not everything has completely broken down) over flowerbeds and around shrubs, helps prevent soil erosion and will replenish much needed nutrients. A layer of about 5cm should do the trick. Make sure you leave a gap around any soft-stemmed plants. Adding mulch after it has rained will help keep the moisture in the soil.

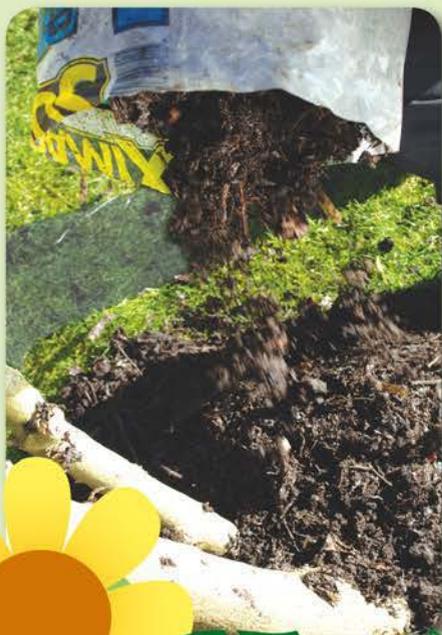


USING YOUR COMPOST

...around trees

Compost is great for your trees. Spreading a 5-10cm layer around the roots will provide them with important nutrients and can protect against drought and disease.

Avoid the base of the tree and do not spread too close to the trunk. Your trees will also benefit from less weeds growing around them. Doing this once or twice a year will help your trees grow taller and bushier in no time at all.



...to replenish pots

Give your potted plants and containers an extra boost by removing the top few centimetres of existing soil and adding your freshly made compost.

Leave a gap around soft stemmed plants. This will provide food for your plants and flowers and is a great way to make them more healthy and robust.



...in patio containers

You can mix home compost with regular soil or leafmould to create your own healthy potting mixture for patio containers.

Your plants and any new plants from seeds will enjoy the additional nutrients and minerals that your compost enriched potting mixture contains, and outdoor container plants will love it too.

About a third of the mix should be compost, slightly less when you are planting seeds. The reason for this is that home made compost is too strong to use on its own for planting into.



To get the most out of your compost, let Philippa Forrester show you how by viewing our video guide at www.recyclenow.com/compost
Available from mid August 2008.





...healthier herbs & vegetables

Compost is excellent for growing herbs such as chives, parsley and mint.

Simply crumble it around the base of the plants for healthier, leafier herbs. Your vegetables will also grow better with compost added to their soil. Apply compost with each rotation – it's exceptionally good for planting potatoes and carrots.



...feeding your lawn

Dressing your lawn with compost helps young grass take root and can make your garden healthier and greener.

First, you'll need to sieve the compost and remove any large twigs or eggshells. Next, mix it with an even amount of sharp sand to compost as this will allow it to spread more easily. You'll want a layer of about 2.5cm. Mature lawns can really benefit from this little extra kick of nutrients but be aware that newly seeded or turfed lawns can be scorched by it.

GREAT FUN FOR KIDS!

Check out the exciting **Compost4fun** web game on our website!

www.recyclenow.com/compost



Here are some optional accessories that may help make your home composting easier



Aerator

An aerator can help you mix up the contents of your compost. There is no need to empty or remove the contents of your bin. Simply push into compost and lift and mix.



Sieve

A sieve helps remove some of the larger pieces of material from your finished compost. This is particularly useful to help achieve a fine compost medium to use as a potting mixture or as a lawn dressing.



Kitchen Caddy

Various designs of kitchen caddies are available to help you collect your organic kitchen waste before taking it to your compost bin.



Liners

Kitchen caddy liners are 100% compostable and are made from corn or potato starch. They are an ideal way to line your caddy to help keep it clean. Although they are not essential for use in the solid side caddies, they do need to be used with the ventilated caddies. Once full, the caddy liner and contents can be put straight into the compost bin.

See www.recyclenow.com/compost for further information.

RECYCLING AUTUMN LEAVES

When autumn arrives you may have a surplus of fallen leaves that could upset the balance of ingredients in your compost bin.

However by turning them into leafmould, a dark brown, crumbly and nutrient-rich material, you can make a great soil improver, lawn conditioner and mulch for your garden.

Leafmould is easy to make, suitable for all types of soil, reduces the need for peat and provides a free, organic matter that can also be used in seed and potting mixes, if well rotted.

Large quantities of dead leaves are best recycled separately because they are broken down by the slow

action of fungi rather than bacteria, and therefore rot slowly. All kinds of deciduous leaves can be used for leafmould, although some may take longer to break down than others.

Making the perfect leafmould

STEP 1 Collect the leaves



Small quantities of leaves are best gathered by hand using a rake; however, if you have a large quantity of leaves, they can be collected with a special leaf blower vacuum, which shreds the material into smaller pieces helping to speed up the decaying process.

STEP 2 Add moisture



If the leaves are dry, moisten them with a little water.

STEP 3 Bag it up



Bag up the leaves in a large bin bag and punch holes in it to allow the air to circulate. Place in a secluded area of the garden.

STEP 4 Use chicken wire



Alternatively, you can make a simple container made from plastic or wire netting with a few supporting stakes which can be reused year after year. Adjust the size to suit your requirements.

STEP 5 A little patience



Leave the bag or container untouched for between one and two years. The longer you leave it, the finer the leafmould will be.

STEP 6 Mulch



'Young' leafmould, which is one to two years old, can be used as mulch around shrubs, herbaceous borders, trees and vegetables – just add it as a layer on top of existing soil.

STEP 7 Soil improver



You can also dig young leafmould into beds as a soil improver for sowing and planting.

STEP 8 Sowing mix



Well rotted leafmould that is two years old or more can be used to make a seed sowing mix. Combine equal parts of leafmould, sharp sand and garden compost for an ideal growing medium.

STEP 9 Potting



For established plants, mix well rotted leafmould that is over two years old with equal parts of sharp sand, garden soil and compost to make a perfect potting compost.

Q. I seem to have a lot of small black flies in my compost bin. Is this good for the compost or should I get rid of them?

A. Fruit flies do not carry disease and do not harm your compost. However, if you find them unpleasant you can reduce their numbers by ensuring that the organic waste destined for your bin is always covered in the kitchen or wherever it is stored. You can eradicate them by keeping the lid off your bin for 3 or 4 days, thus allowing the predator beetles to gain access and kill them for you; and by covering the compost surface with about an inch of soil to prevent the hatching flies from being able to escape. They are not an indicator of a failing bin.

Q. Why does my bin smell?

A. You need to introduce more oxygen in your compost bin so that your waste can break down aerobically. By mixing bulky items such as toilet roll tubes, cardboard or crumpled up or shredded paper into your bin you can introduce pockets of air.

Q. I've waited a while but I still don't have any compost at the bottom of my compost bin. Why is this?

A. Don't forget it takes 9-12 months to make finished compost. Keep adding a good balance of greens and browns and the creatures will keep composting everything down.

Q. Why do I get a lot of ants in my bin?

A. Ants are part of the home composting process but it could mean that your bin is too dry. For a quick fix, add some cold water to your bin. Over time, you need to add more 'green' nitrogen rich items such as grass cuttings and kitchen peelings to keep moisture levels up.

Q. Do compost bins attract rats?

A. Some people worry that having a compost bin could attract rats. But in fact there are many other reasons why rats may already be in the vicinity of your garden.

For example if you live near water, farm land/open countryside or derelict buildings, you are likely to have rats living around the local area. They may be attracted into your garden, like other animals, to look for a dry place to shelter, for example under a shed or decking or to find food.

One common source of food is over-feeding wild birds (leaving excess food exposed).

A rat is only likely to seek out a compost bin in the garden if incorrect waste items have been composted, making the bin a source of food as well as a shelter. For this reason you should not compost cooked foods, dairy products, meat, fish or bones. However, a compost bin that is used a lot will deter them.

For more information please visit our website www.recyclenow.com/compost

- The Know Your Compost Campaign works to raise awareness of peat-free composts and soil conditioners containing recycled garden materials, such as grass clippings, prunings and leaves. Products are competitively priced, great for the garden, provide the key nutrients that plants need to thrive, and are good for the environment as they keep garden waste out of landfill. Did you know that we send enough garden waste to landfill each year to fill the Royal Albert Hall with grass, twigs and leaves more than 70 times over!

Log on to www.recyclenow.com/garden for more details on where to buy peat-free compost containing recycled materials and great tips on how to make your garden bloom.

- Recycling is an easy way of reducing the amount of waste we send to landfill and helps save energy and natural resources. For information about what you can recycle in your area, and to discover what happens to your recycling, please visit www.recyclenow.com
- Day after day in the UK we throw away nearly 4½ million whole apples and over 5 million untouched potatoes. Wasted fruits, vegetables and salads cost us, and the environment, dear. Vegetable peelings and fruit cores are never going to be on the menu, so composting is great for these. To help save money and enjoy all the fruit, vegetables and salads we buy, find lots of practical tips and recipes at www.lovefoodhatewaste.com
- WRAP are working in partnership with EST (Energy Savings Trust) to help consumers reduce their carbon footprint. Visit www.energysavingtrust.org.uk or call 0800 512 012
- To calculate your carbon footprint and ways to reduce it, visit www.direct.gov.uk/ActOnCO2 or call the Act On CO₂ advice line on 0800 512012

LOVE
FOOD
hate waste

ACT ON
C  **2**

 **energy saving trust**



For further advice, hints, tips and information please visit

www.recyclenow.com/compost

or call us on

0845 600 0323

quoting reference GUIDE

WRAP helps individuals, businesses and local authorities to reduce waste and recycle more, making better use of resources and helping to tackle climate change. While steps have been taken to ensure its accuracy, WRAP cannot accept responsibility or be held liable to any person for any loss or damage arising out of or in connection with this information being inaccurate, incomplete or misleading. This material is copyrighted. It may be reproduced free of charge subject to the material being accurate and not used in a misleading context. The source of the material must be identified and the copyright status acknowledged. This material must not be used to endorse or used to suggest WRAP's endorsement of a commercial product or service. For more detail, please refer to our Terms & Conditions on our website -www.wrap.org.uk