

HOMEMADE COMPOSTING: THE BENEFITS & HOW TO MAKE YOUR OWN



Composting is one of the most important things you can do for your garden. Not only does it improve your soil by adding organic matter; but it also helps to keep your plants healthy and reduces the need for chemical fertilisers. Composting is the best way to reduce waste and helps improve your garden at the same time. Learn how to make your own compost with simple ingredients.

WHAT IS COMPOST?

Compost is the process of recycling organic matter into a valuable fertiliser. It is comprised of leaves and food scraps helping to enrich soil and plants. Everything that grows inevitably decomposes. Composting produces an environment that naturally speeds up the decomposition process creating a matter essential in farming and agriculture. Composting promotes healthier plant growth whilst preventing soil erosion and reducing waste. Its other benefits include retaining moisture and enriching the soil. Not only does it contribute to the compression of plant diseases it also reduces the need for chemical fertilisers which harm the microbes present in the ground.



IS COMPOST THE SAME AS SOIL?

Composting is an essential component of organic gardening. The finished product is rich, dark, crumbly, and sweet-smelling and is made from the garden, kitchen, and dry waste that has been recycled. Make potting mixes and use them to nourish and condition your soil.

The RHS encourages home composting because it does not require heavy transport with its associated environmental costs, even though councils offer green waste collections.

All gardens can benefit from composting. The only downside is that it can often take up a large amount of space. Worm composting might be a better option for those with such small plots.

WHEN & HOW TO COMPOST

Composting is done throughout the year whenever appropriate materials are produced in the garden or at home. However, the best time to make compost is from late summer to early winter.

1: Find the right spot and bin

The microorganisms (bacteria and fungi) that turn waste into compost work best in constant conditions, so it's important that the location doesn't get wet or cold. Place the bin in a light or shaded area; Frequently, using a garden's shaded area is more convenient.

If you must compost on a hard surface, however, add a spadeful of soil to the compost bin. An earth base allows drainage and access to soil organisms.

Even though an open heap that is not enclosed in a bin will eventually compost, bins retain some warmth and moisture and produce better compost more quickly. As long as they keep out rain, keep some heat in, allow drainage, and let air in, any of the available compost bins should be able to produce compost.

The efficiency of smaller bins is much lower than that of larger ones, which measure less than 1.3 cubic yards.

2: Create Your Brown Base

Fill the bottom of your compost bin about 1/8 to 1/4 full with dry leaves. Composting can be thought of as layers of “browns,” which are dead leaves, twigs, etc., and “greens,” which are food waste, grass clippings, etc. therefore, this step marks the start of your brown base.

3: Add Dirt

Dust the newspaper or leaves with dirt until the container is half full. Again, we have plenty of that, but if you need more, you could buy a bag of basic topsoil. Worms in your dirt are not necessary.

4: Toss In Your Food Scraps!

Place any paper products or food scraps you want to compost! Fruit and vegetable scraps, coffee grounds, coffee filters, or tea bags, eggshells and nutshells, paper or cardboard, and grass clippings are all excellent compostable materials.

5: Stir Your Compost (Turning the heap)

Air is added by turning the heap; Composting can't happen without air. Composting takes longer and requires less air if the heap is too wet or becomes compacted.

Ideally, pile a lot of composting materials on top of the heap at once and rotate it frequently (maybe every month) to let air in. Most likely, poor results are primarily due to the heap not being turned. Due to the gradual accumulation of waste by many gardeners, they are unable to fill the pile all at once. As a result, although homemade compost is not always as effective as municipal compost, it is still better.

Keep the heap moist even in dry weather; turning it will allow you to check the level of moisture.

6: Moisten!

Use lukewarm water to spray until the surface is moist but not soaking wet. Note: If your compost begins to smell, excessive water may be the cause.

7: Collect Your Compostable Materials Inside

The maturation period of garden compost can range from six months to two years. Compost that has matured will be dark brown, have a texture resembling that of crumbly soil, and smell like damp woodland.

The remaining un-rotted material can be added to the subsequent batch of composting materials, although it is unlikely that all of the materials in the heap will be in this condition.

Getting the right balance

To feed the microorganisms, aim for 25 to 50 per cent soft green materials, such as grass clippings, annual weeds, vegetable kitchen waste, or manure. The remaining portion should be woody brown materials, such as pruning's, wood chips, paper, cardboard, straw, or dead leaves. The microorganisms and bacteria that make compost work best when there is a proper balance of green and brown materials.

Grass clippings, in particular, should not be allowed to dominate the heap because they can produce a slimy, odourless mess on their own.

Brown woody material should be mixed with kitchen waste and grass clippings because they tend to be wet and easily compact, excluding air.



COMPOSTING MATERIALS

Green:

Grass, plants with soft leaves, (such as annual weeds), vegetables and uncooked kitchen scraps, bedding/selected pet waste

Brown:

Trimnings from hedges and pruning's (ideally shredded), leaves, woodchip, shredded paper and card, straw, and plant stems

Accelerators & Activators:

When there is a lack of green waste, products like "Garotta" may be added. They are necessary if there is a lot of green waste, but they have a lot of nitrogen, a nutrient that comes from it. Carbon activators, which are nutrients found in brown woody waste, can also be purchased. These are for the purpose of composting grass clippings and other green waste in areas with a lack of brown waste.

Lime:

There are times when people believe that lime needs to be added to the compost heap; however, this is not necessary.





9 WAYS TO USE FINISHED COMPOST

There are plenty of ways to use the valuable results. A more prevalent issue is that there is rarely sufficient compost available. Because of this, what you do with it is even more crucial.

1. Use as a mulch
2. Mix in with DIY potting soil
3. Feed perennials
4. Feed bulbs
5. Spread across new or established lawns
6. Top-dressing garden beds
7. Add to fruit trees
8. Use to feed container plants
9. Grow watermelons, tomatoes and cucumbers

Problems

Sometimes homemade composting doesn't turn out as expected. Here are a few things to know:

Compost that is wet, slimy, and has a strong odour

Most of the time, it's because there isn't enough air or water. Add additional brown waste, such as shredded woodchip, straw, or paper, and cover the heap to keep the rain out.

Dry, fibrous, and rotting-free

Typically, excessive brown material and insufficient moisture are the causes. Try a commercial activator or accelerator like “Garotta” or more green waste. Alternately, one bucket of fresh manure, 270 grams (9 ounces) of fish, blood, and bone fertiliser, or 140 grams (5 ounces) of sulphate of ammonia fertiliser can be added for every 15 cm (6 inches) of compost layer.

Flies

If you do find swarms of flies in your compost bin, make sure to cover the kitchen waste with garden waste after adding it to the heap and make sure the moisture levels aren’t too high, as this can make the heap too dry.

Frequently Asked Questions

How long does it take for compost to mature?

“The maturation of homemade compost can take anywhere from six months to two years. Compost that has matured will have a dark brown appearance, a texture resembling that of crumbly soil, and a smell similar to damp woodland,” says Chris Bonnett, gardening expert for [The Express Newspaper](#).

How often does compost need to be turned?

Compost heaps should be turned every three to four days to increase temperature and increase the speed of decomposition.



What can not be composted?

The following are items that can not be composted: meat and fish scraps, dairy, fats and oils, plants or wood treated with pesticides or preservatives, black walnut tree debris, diseased or insect-infested plants, weeds that have gone to seed, charcoal ash, dog or cat waste.



How long does homemade compost last?

Compost can be stored for an unlimited amount of time, but the longer it is kept, the more nutrients it loses. Three to four months after completion, compost is at its best. But compost can still be used after that. The nutrients in the compost degrade further or escape the compost over time.

Can you leave compost over winter?

“In the winter, turning the compost pile is not necessary because doing so will only cause heat loss within the pile. The decomposition process may be further slowed by this. Instead, wait until the pile has completely thawed before turning it in the spring,” says Chris Bonnett, gardening expert for [The Express Newspaper](#).



Can you overdo compost?

Even though adding compost can increase soil organic matter and improve soil health, too much compost can cause damage for plants.