

Composting Information

- Air is essential for odour free composting. If necessary a stake or a crowbar can be pushed through the heap to create aeration vents.
- Turn the compost immediately if offensive odours are produced. It is an indication that there is not enough air in the heap.
- Decomposition is faster in the warm summer months than in the winter.
- The compost heap needs to be large enough to insulate itself in order to retain the heat from the activity of the decomposer organisms. A cubic metre or slightly larger is sufficient size for open heaps.

Did You Know...

Compost Activators

Compost activators contain "cultured" strains of bacteria and other additives. The fact is that these special inoculants are not needed. Every piece of material you add to your heap/bin is covered with thousands of nature's natural decomposers, bacteria. That's more than enough to do the job.

Compost Boosters

There are a number of suggested additives for boosting compost performance such as stale beer and soft drinks to increase biological activity. Activity will increase but mostly in the form of ants and flies.

Worms

It has become popular to add worms to compost heaps due to some confusion with worm composting. (see Guide to Worm Composting) Worms are extremely beneficial but need not be added or purchased: just build the heap and they will come if the heap is composting properly.

Fertilisers

Adding artificial fertilisers to a heap is expensive, wasteful, and harmful to worms and decomposers. If you have to add nitrogen to a heap because it's made up of all browns such as leaves, then always try and use organic fertilisers such as animal manure or dried blood.

Lime

Many composters mistakenly add lime to their heaps to produce neutral compost. Unfortunately, all this does is turn your compost ecosystem into an ammonia factory with the nitrogen being lost as a noxious gas. Mature compost is nearly always near a neutral pH.

Odours

A properly built compost heap will have a small but not unpleasant odour. Strong and unpleasant odours usually result from mistakes: like composting grass clippings on their own, adding too many food scraps or the wrong type of foods. Bad odours will also occur if the heap becomes too wet or has too little air.

Animals And Pests

Adding food to a compost heap will make it more attractive to pests. This is only a problem if it is not managed properly, like dumping them on top of the heap for example. In urban areas an enclosed compost bin is the best solution.

For More Information Contact:

Christchurch City Council, P O Box 237, Christchurch Phone 941-8830
email: waste@ccc.govt.nz www.ccc.govt.nz/composting

A Guide To GARDEN COMPOSTING



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KEEP COMPOST IN THE BACKYARD AND OUT OF THE WASTE STREAM.

MAY 2004

What Is Composting?

Composting is a natural process in which micro-organisms decay organic material such as leaves, paper, napkins and food waste into a soil like material. These decomposer organisms live all around us and the most important ones are too small for us to see. Bacteria are the prime decomposers in a compost heap and they arrive on every single piece of organic matter. Composting merely controls the conditions so that materials decompose faster.

Compost Is?

Compost is quite different from the material that it was made from. It is free from unpleasant odours, is easy to handle and stores for long periods of time. It is a natural plant food, soil conditioner and mulch, adds organic matter to the soil and encourages soil life and earthworms. Composting provides the gardener with an excellent material to enrich the soil.

Why Compost?

Environmentally, composting makes good sense. It is a simple cost-effective natural way to recycle your kitchen and garden waste materials. It is cheaper than taking these materials to the refuse station or causing air pollution from burning garden waste.

If you don't already compost TRY IT! It's great fun as well as participating in a recycling programme that is helping to create a better future for us all.

Materials You Can Compost

Greens - kitchen vegetable and fruit scraps, vegetable peelings, tea leaves, coffee grounds, soft garden debris, lawn clippings.

Browns - paper, sawdust, straw, leaves, cereal boxes, cardboard, napkins, tree clippings, woody materials such as cabbage stalks.

Both kitchen and garden material will compost much quicker when chipped, chopped or crushed into smaller pieces. Napkins, paper and cardboard are best ripped into small pieces and soaked in water prior to composting.

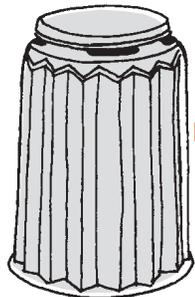
Materials not to be composted.

- Meat, fish, fats or cooking /salad oils (these may create odour and fly problems).
- Wood, bones, inert materials (such as tins, glass or plastic), or diseased plant material.
- Plant foliage with residue of chemical sprays, especially hormone type weedkillers.
- Oxalis and other problem weeds such as live twitch, convolvulus, docks and dandelions.
- Toxic material in general.

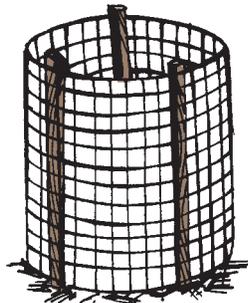
The Compost Recipe

For peak efficiency you need a good balance of these basic four ingredients:

The basic four = Greens + Browns + Water + Air



▶ Commercially made composting units are also available.



▶ Netting frame wrapped around wooden stakes and lined with cardboard or newspaper to retain heat.

How To Compost

Getting Started

It is tidier to make your compost in a bin or container. You can make this yourself at little cost. Some examples of simply constructed home compost bins are included in this leaflet. Alternatively, a number of commercially made compost bins are available. These include plastic and wooden units and compost tumblers.

Choosing The Site

Locate your compost bin in a sheltered, level area of the garden that has good drainage and access. The site should be within reach of a garden hose, and preferably not in full sun. The compost heap should sit directly on the soil.

Making The Compost

- Before positioning the bin, fork over the soil on the site to aid drainage and encourage earthworms into the heap. If using an enclosed container it may be necessary to raise it up on a few bricks.
- Always start with a layer 100–150mm of coarse material to ensure good drainage and ventilation. Coarse partly decomposed materials from a previous heap can be used.
- Throw in a bucketful of greens – fruit and vegetable matter, lawn clippings etc. and a bucketful of browns – straw, paper, leaves, twigs etc. Add a little water as you go if the materials are dry. Mix, stir and fluff after every few additions for a hard working compost stew. The compost needs to be moist so as to maintain a consistency of a squeezed out sponge.
- Within a day or two, the heap will heat up and start to shrink. This is the start of the composting process.
- Continue to build the compost heap to the required size as materials become available and then cover with soil or plastic sheeting. If using a bin, when the bin is full, cover it with straw, soil, old sacks or similar materials. This helps to retain the heat and keep out flies. Finally fit the lid and leave the compost to mature.
- Start another bin or heap.

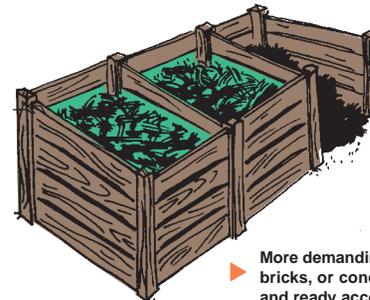
Turning

Decomposition takes time. Turning the heap will speed up the process but is not essential. Composting takes about 3–4 months if the heap is turned. However, if it is not, allow up to 9–12 months for the compost to mature. For optimum results turn the heap once every four to six weeks. This will aerate the heap, expose fresh material for more rapid decomposition, redistribute the decomposer organisms and allow you to add water if required.

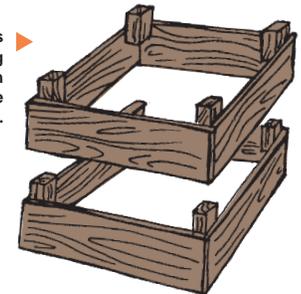
Using Your Compost

Your compost can be used at any time of the year but for best results it should be dug into the existing soil in the autumn or spring. Dig the compost into the top 50–100mm of the soil surface to improve soil texture, structure and fertility.

If the compost is quite coarse it may be necessary to sieve it through chicken netting prior to use. Any stalky or woody material removed can then be recycled into the next heap.



▶ This type of stacking bin has the advantage of being moveable around a section and can be extended to cope with large amounts of material.



▶ More demanding units can be made from wood, bricks, or concrete blocks. Again, holes for air and ready access from the front are necessary.