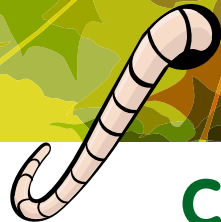


Your guide to home composting

Waste is to my
taste



Want a great garden?
Leave it to me!



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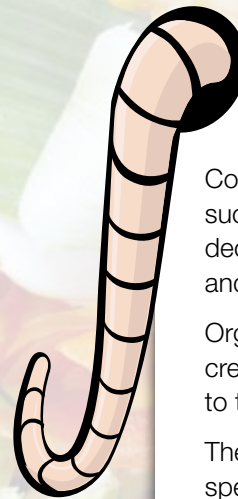
What is composting?

Composting is a natural process where organic materials such as garden and kitchen waste break down and decompose to produce a nutrient-rich food for your soil and plants – called compost.

Organic waste is decomposed in nature by naturally occurring creatures, ranging from single-celled bacteria that are invisible to the human eye to large earthworms and insects.

The idea of home composting is to manage, control and speed up the natural decomposition process by making conditions favourable for these creatures to get to work. It also has the added benefit that we can use the compost we create to make our gardens beautiful.

Home composting is riddled with more myths than earthworms so this handy guide aims to provide you with simple, easy to follow guidance on how to home compost with ease and most importantly – success!



I'll make a meal
of your peel!



The benefits of composting are endless!

If you are not already convinced by composting, take a look below and you will be pulling on the gardening gloves before you can say... compost!

- Composting saves you money! You will produce something of value out of something worth nothing! No more popping down to the garden centre to buy bags of compost... all you need to do is walk to your compost bin and enjoy using your 'free' compost
- Producing your own nutritious compost has endless benefits for your plants and soil ranging from feeding your plants to improving soil structure
- Home composting reduces the amount of waste that needs to be collected by refuse collection vehicles. This in turn conserves non renewable resources and reduces vehicle emissions
- Home composting is good for your well-being. It keeps you active and can be a great way for all the family to get involved and get close to nature

Now that you know the wonderful benefits of home composting, why not give it a go? An important thing to remember is that:

'COMPOSTING IS EASY!'

All you need is a little time, patience and guidance.

The following steps will guide you through the composting process and provide plenty of hints and tips to produce your own top quality compost.

STEP 1

Choose a compost bin

The first thing you need to do is decide what kind of compost system you would like to use. Compost systems range from a simple heap of organic waste at the bottom of the garden to specially designed bins. Compost bins come in lots of shapes, sizes and designs to suit all garden sizes and needs.

One of the most popular designs is a plastic bin moulded into a cone shape with its top sliced off. These compost bins are often described as 'daleks' due to their shape and generally come in 220 litres and 330 litres. Larger, self assembly cube shaped bins are also popular for bigger gardens. You will find that most plastic compost bins are made from recycled plastic.

Typically, compost bins have a secure lid and a small hatch at the bottom to access the compost when it is ready. Compost bins tend to have no base allowing organisms and insects easy access to the bin's contents.

TOP TIP

Why not have a go at making your own compost bin using old wooden pallets and reuse an old piece of carpet as the lid?

Discounted compost bins and accessories can be purchased directly from:
www.sheffield.getcomposting.com
For more information about purchasing compost bins, visit: www.veolia.co.uk/sheffield
contact: 0114 273 4567 or
email: sheffieldenquiries@veolia.co.uk

TOP TIPS



STEP 2

Give your compost bin a home

It is now important to give your compost bin a suitable place to live in your garden. The following handy hints will help you to find the perfect place for your bin to live that is suitable for successful composting and for you to use with ease:

- Find a level area... you don't want it rolling down hill or toppling over
- Ideally, the bin should be placed on well-drained, bare soil or grass to allow organisms easy access to the contents of your bin
- Choose a fairly sunny spot that is sheltered from the wind
- Avoid positioning your bin too close to trees as the tree roots may grow under the bin, making it difficult to manage your heap and access your compost
- Place your bin somewhere that is practical for you to use – close enough to your house for you to conveniently fill and accessible for you to empty

Don't worry too much if you don't have any bare ground or grass in your garden. If you only have hard standing e.g. **flagging** or a **patio**, you can still compost but you may need to add some worms yourself. You could either go on a worm hunt in your garden or purchase them in bulk from: www.wigglywiggles.co.uk

You may also need to stuff paper around the base of the bin to absorb any excess moisture. A couple of inches of soil in the bottom will also help to absorb moisture and provide some organisms to get you started.

If you have clay-like soil, loosen it with a fork to improve drainage before positioning your bin.

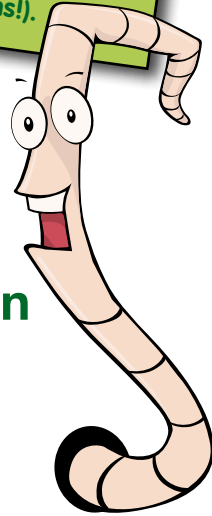
If you don't have any level ground to site your compost bin, dig away some soil to create a flat area.





TOP TIP

When deciding if something can go in your compost bin, it is useful to remember – 'anything that once lived can be composted' (please note that there are a few exceptions!).



STEP 3

Get filling your compost bin

Now you have found a suitable location for your bin, it's time to get composting and start filling your bin full of organic ingredients to make your compost.

Around 60% of the household waste we generate is compostable and you will be amazed by some of the things that can be composted. All compostable ingredients can be classified as either a 'green' or a 'brown' dependent on their characteristics:

GREENS ✓

Wetter items
Quick to rot or decompose
Nitrogen rich

BROWNS ✓

Drier items
Slow to rot or decompose
Carbon rich

A full check list of green and brown compostable ingredient are listed opposite.



PUT THESE IN!

GREENS

- ✓ Tea bags and tea leaves
- ✓ Coffee grounds and filter paper
- ✓ Vegetable, salad and fruit remains – this includes peelings, cores, stalks and flesh
- ✓ Grass cuttings
- ✓ Dead flowers
- ✓ Nettles (young ones are best) and Comfrey
- ✓ Old bedding plants
- ✓ Rhubarb leaves
- ✓ Young annual weeds before they have had a chance to go to seed
- ✓ Young plants
- ✓ Pondweed



BROWNS

- ✓ Crushed egg shells
- ✓ Cardboard - shredded or scrunched e.g. egg boxes, cereal boxes, toilet roll tubes
- ✓ Paper - shredded or scrunched e.g. newspapers, office paper, paper bags, notepad paper
- ✓ Tissue paper, kitchen paper, paper towels
- ✓ Garden prunings, twigs and hedge clippings and trimmings
- ✓ Autumn tree leaves
- ✓ Straw and hay e.g. from animal bedding
- ✓ Bedding from vegetarian pets (including the droppings) e.g rabbits, guinea pigs, hamsters
- ✓ Ashes from wood, paper and charcoal, sawdust and wood chippings/shavings
- ✓ Natural textiles – cut into small pieces e.g. wool, cotton and silk
- ✓ Feathers from old pillows or duvets
- ✓ Vacuum bag contents and floor sweepings
- ✓ Hair and fur – when you de-hair your brush or if you cut hair using clippers, add to your heap! Pet fur can also be added
- ✓ Nail clippings, including feline claw clippings
- ✓ Old growing medium e.g. from hanging baskets or grow bags
- ✓ Cork – chop up before adding to heap
- ✓ Nut shells e.g. pistachio shells
- ✓ Corn cobs and stalks

TOP TIP

The most convenient thing to do is to have a small caddy or container in your kitchen for your compostable kitchen waste. Then every few days or when full, empty it into your compost bin in one go. Caddies can be purchased from:

www.sheffield.getcomposting.com

Alternatively, reuse an old plastic container such as an ice cream tub as your caddy.

TOP TIPS

Go easy on the amount of acidic fruit you compost, such as oranges, limes and lemons. Too much acid will upset the worms. They are also not too keen on onions, leeks and garlic so go easy on those too.

If you use a juicer, don't waste the fruit pulp... put it in your compost bin!

Put pesky slugs and snails to good use. Instead of them munching on your living plants in the garden, put them in your compost bin and let them munch on your organic waste.

After you've shredded your old statements or credit card bills - compost them!

KEEP THESE OUT!



Diseased plants



Biodegradable nappies



Cat and dog faeces



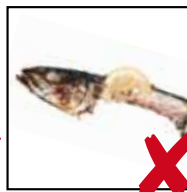
Cat litter



Cooked food scraps



Dairy food e.g. cheese



Meat and fish



Meat and fish bones



Glossy paper, foil wrapping paper, glossy leaflets



Man-made items e.g. plastics, glass, metals – these materials take hundreds of years to biodegrade

STEP 4

Manage the contents of your bin to make good compost

Although composting is a natural process and home composting is easy, if you want to make good, nutritious compost, there are three key things you need to be aware of.

The key to success is ensuring that the conditions in the compost bin are favourable for the creatures and micro organisms that do all the hard work of transforming the waste into compost.

1. Get the Ingredients right – greens and browns

- It is absolutely essential that you add a good variety of 'green' and 'brown' ingredients to your compost bin. This is because the organisms that decompose the contents of your bin require both greens and browns in order to function. A bin full of greens will result in a smelly, slimy mess, whereas a bin full of browns will just sit there not doing very much at all
- Ideally, you should aim to add **equal amounts of greens and browns** to your bin by volume. Each time you add some browns, add some greens at the same time and vice versa
- A good balance of greens and browns is also important to ensure that your end product has a good consistency and texture

TOP TIP

If you find that you generate more greens than browns, keep an ongoing store of browns e.g. cardboard to shred or paper to scrunch to ensure a constant supply.



2. Keep it aerated

- In order for the micro organisms to survive and keep active, they need air to breath – just like us. It is important to make sure the contents of your bin are aerated at all times to provide the organisms with an oxygen supply
- The best way to aerate the contents of your bin is to ‘turn it’. This can be done using a garden fork to turn over or mix it up. A more thorough alternative is to actually empty the contents of your bin, mix it up with a fork and return it to the bin. Ideally, you should aim to turn every few weeks to speed up the decomposition process
- If this sounds too much like hard work, simply use a broom handle or similar device to poke holes through the contents of the bin – any aeration is better than none
- You can also create air pockets by adding browns such as shredded cardboard, scrunched-up paper or twigs that will trap air

3. Keep it moist... but NOT WET!

- In order for the micro organisms to survive and keep active they need water. It is important that the contents of your compost bin are kept moist. However, it is equally important that it doesn't get too wet. It should be like a wrung out sponge
- If the content of your bin gets too dry, especially likely in the summer months, sprinkle enough water into the bin to moisten it. Do it bit by bit to avoid over watering. Alternatively, add and mix in some water rich ‘greens’ such as grass or fruit peelings
- Prevent your bin's contents from getting too wet by making sure you secure the lid on the bin after use. If it does get too wet, add some browns such as cardboard and mix in with the contents of the bin to soak up any excess water



STEP 5

Enjoy using your compost

Providing all goes to plan, you should now have some lovely compost ready to use. Depending on how well you have looked after your heap, you should have your finished compost ready to dig out your bin between 9 - 12 months. Your compost can now be utilised in various ways to produce endless benefits to make your garden beautiful:

Soil improver

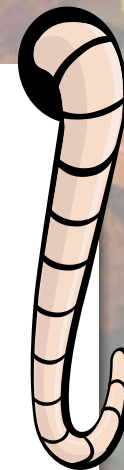
Compost is a fantastic soil improver. Simply dig a 10 - 15cm layer of your compost into the soil or leave it on top and let the worms mix it up. The compost will benefit your soil's structure, drainage and air flow and provide essential nutrients to feed your plants. You can use your compost on flowerbeds, new borders, around the base of trees and house plants.

Mulching

Part finished or more woody compost can be used as mulch. Spread the mulch around the plants and leave it to break down. Don't mulch right up to the stems of your plants, leave a gap of at least 5cms. Mulching is a great way to suppress weeds, retain moisture and maintain soil temperatures.

Potting compost

Use your compost to make your own nutritious potting mixture for seeds and plants. To make your own potting compost you will need to add additional nutrients and minerals by mixing the compost in equal parts with sieved garden soil and leaf mould.





The compost complaint surgery

1 I've found a rat in my compost bin. HELP!

Be assured that your compost bin has NOT caused the rat to appear. Rats will only appear if they already live in the area. The key to preventing rats entering your compost bin is to make the bin as undesirable and inaccessible as possible.

Follow these tips for a rat free and rat proof compost bin:

- ✓ Rats will be particularly attracted to a top notch menu of cooked protein (e.g. meat or fish) or dairy food (e.g. cheese). Make sure you or any member of your family does NOT place cooked or dairy food in the compost bin
- ✓ Rats do not like being disturbed so each time you pass your bin, give it a shake or mix up the contents to disturb them
- ✓ Rats do not like moist environments so don't allow your heap to dry out
- ✓ Rats do not like open spaces so avoid placing your bin in a bordered area e.g. next to a fence or wall
- ✓ Make it difficult for the rats to enter the bin. A good preventative measure is to line the base of your bin with wire meshing e.g. chicken wire. This will help deter them from entering in the first place

2 My compost heap is swarming with fruit flies. What can I do to get rid of them?

Fruit flies are a very common nuisance in compost bins. Fruit flies prefer warm, humid conditions and as their name suggests, they are attracted to the sugars from rotting fruit and vegetables.

Follow these fruit fly free tips:

- ✓ Disguise your fruit/vegetable ingredients from the flies by covering with shredded paper or cardboard. It is a good idea to line your caddy with newspaper and then as you empty it into the compost bin, wrap up and encase the scraps with the paper lining. Alternatively, peel directly onto newspaper
- ✓ Make sure your greens are adequately balanced with browns as these attract the fruit flies natural predators and keep the heap aerated



3 My compost heap is really wet and slimy. What am I doing wrong?

Chances are you haven't quite mastered the green and brown balancing act. The most common cause of a wet and slimy heap is that you have overdone the greens. Alternatively, have you over watered the heap or let it get rained on?

Wave goodbye with these slime busting tips:

- ✓ Turn your heap for aeration and add some browns such as shredded cardboard and woody prunings
- ✓ Once you've got rid of the slime, try and maintain the green and brown balance. If you find that you generate more greens than browns, try and save up a stock of browns e.g. paper and cardboard
- ✓ Make sure you always return the compost bin's lid to prevent it being rained on and don't forget to only add enough water to make it moist - not wet!

4 My compost heap is too dry. What am I doing wrong?

Chances are you have added too many browns to your heap. Alternatively, have you neglected to water your heap?

Moisten up your heap with these tips:

- ✓ Turn your heap and incorporate some greens such as grass clippings or fruit peelings
- ✓ Water your pile. Don't forget it is equally important not to over water it

5 The contents of my compost bin don't seem to heat up. What am I doing wrong?

If the contents of your compost bin are not heating up, the chances are that conditions inside your bin are not favourable for the organisms so they have stopped decomposing the organic matter for you.

Heat up your bin with these 'steaming' top tips:

- ✓ Is your bin lacking 'greens'? Add and mix in some greens such as grass clippings and fruit peelings
- ✓ Is your bin too dry? Add more greens and mix in with other ingredient or moisten with water
- ✓ Is the bin lacking oxygen? Aerate the content by turning or mixing

6 My compost heap smells. I can't stand it much more!

The smell that commonly arises from compost bins is that of ammonia. The ammonia aroma is commonly a result of too many greens, such as grass clippings and fruit in your bin.

Don't worry, we have a much better solution than wearing a peg on your nose! Say goodbye to ammonia with these top tips:

- ✓ Add more browns to balance out the greens and to introduce air pockets
- ✓ Turn your pile to aerate it
- ✓ If you have any clumps of green waste e.g. grass clippings, break them up with a fork and mix in some browns, such as shredded cardboard

Master composting scheme

- ✓ Are you passionate about composting?
- ✓ Would you like to inspire others to get composting?
- ✓ Would you like to learn more about composting?
- ✓ Do you have a few hours to spare?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, why not sign up to be one of Sheffield's

Master Composters!

The Master Composting Scheme recruits local volunteers to help other residents learn about home composting. The scheme provides volunteers with in-depth training and support to spread the word and encourage others to get composting!

Sign up to be a Master Composter

TODAY!

For more information about the
Master Composting Scheme

please call:

0114 273 4567

or email:

sheffieldenquiries@veolia.co.uk





Home composting
is easy!

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