



GARDEN COMPOST

COMPOSTING AND HOW TO PRODUCE YOUR OWN

Composting is not a new thing as it has been practised around the world for many thousands of years.

The process is quite straight forward and following a tried and tested formula you can produce very good clean compost for your garden for free and remove some of the burden on landfill sites.

To get started all you require are:

A suitable location on free-draining soil and in a sunny spot.

A container to hold the organic materials in; plastic composter/bin, wooden slatted box.

A good mix of organic materials, (see [What can you compost?](#))

A suitable activator, (see Suitable Activators)

What can you compost?

- **Grass cuttings.** High in nitrogen and a good activator. Best mixed with other coarse materials not in thick layers.
- **Weeds.** All annual weeds and seeds will be killed when the compost reaches 66°C / 150°F. Do not attempt to compost perennial weeds like couch grass or bindweed, as they will infest your heap.
- **Vegetable and fruit peelings.** Also high in nitrogen and carbon.
- **Tea leaves, coffee grounds and crushed egg shells.**
- **Animal manure.** Farmyard animals or vegetarian pets, all are best if mixed with straw.
- **Hair.** From your pets or family are OK.
- **Paper.** Soft cardboard like egg trays are OK in small quantities and best shredded.
- **Evergreen clippings.** These take a long time to decompose so should be added in small amounts. The resins in conifers are toxic and require composting for longer.
- **Prunings.** Add small amounts and are best if they have been chopped up or crushed.
- **Straw & Hay.** Old and chopped is best, soak if dry.
- **Leaves.** Take a long time to breakdown due to the lignin content. They are best dealt with separately in leaf mould heaps.

What to avoid in the compost heap

- **Disposable nappies and used paper hankies.** The composting process does not kill off all pathogens.
- **Excrement.** Human, cats or dog for the above reason.
- **Paper/Card,** any that is printed with coloured inks or a shiny surface.
- **Cooked Kitchen Waste.**
- **Raw Meat.** It attracts animals and vermin.
- **Hard objects.** Stones, glass, metal or plastics.
- **Cleaning Fluids,** and other household /garden chemicals.

Ideal Requirements for the Best Results

- **Warmth.** Always keep the lid on your compost bin to retain heat and moisture. Keep it out of the wind so as to retain heat. Plastic bins will absorb heat and transfer it to the compost. During winter it would be useful to insulate your container with bubble wrap to keep temperatures within higher.
- **Moisture.** Do not let the compost dry out. Add water to keep moist in very hot weather or with dry materials.
- **Air.** It is very important that the micro-organisms get sufficient air for the composting process to work. To achieve this, turning of the material will mix air throughout the heap. Also avoid using too much grass clippings.
- **Micro-organisms.** Compost heaps can be inoculated with micro-organisms from other heaps or with organic manures. Compost worms can also be purchased to add to your heap.

Suitable Activators

- Natural activators include: Grass, nettles, pondweed, seaweed, comfrey, urine, pigeon and other farm yard manure's.
- Activators or accelerators, although not essential heat up and speed up the composting process. Very helpful in the colder months.
- Other activators such as Garotta in both powder and liquid form can be used; also useful are Blood Fish & Bone, Nitro-Chalk and Sulphate of Ammonia.

When is it ready?

- The compost is ready when it does not look like any of materials that you put in.
- It should be brown and crumbly.
- It should not have any unpleasant smells.

How/where can I use it?

- Clay soil, compost will open it up making it lighter to work and allow better drainage and aeration.
- Sandy soil will improve, as the compost will stick the particles together, holding moisture and slowing drainage.
- Use as mulch. A 3" depth of compost will help retain moisture reduce weed growth. Also nutrients will be released in to the soil as well as improving texture.