

# EASY COMPOSTING

Home composting is one of the most natural and efficient ways of recycling.

1.

## SET UP YOUR KITCHEN

It's easy to do your bit, it's cheap and provides many benefits:

- improves plant health and soil structure by adding nutrients
- reduces water use in the garden
- saves money spent on fertilisers and mulch
- reduces your household garbage and saves landfill space
- reduces the cost of waste disposal to the community
- reduces greenhouse gases produced when organic material rots in landfill.



Place your fruit and vegetable scraps in your kitchen compost bin and when full, take the food waste out to the compost bin in your garden. Remember to clean out the kitchen scraps bin regularly.

2.

## SET UP YOUR GARDEN

Work out what type of compost bin you are going to use and place it in a spot that is level, well-draining, sunny and convenient to access from your kitchen. Next to a deciduous tree is ideal for the summer afternoon shade to prevent it from drying out.



3.

## COMPOST INGREDIENTS

To make good compost you need a mixture of greens & browns, water/ moisture and aeration.

### GREENS (NITROGEN-RICH)

- Food scraps
- Coffee grounds & tea bags
- Fresh grass clippings
- Flowers & other plant matter (non-woody)
- Fresh leaves
- Manures (cow, horse, sheep, chicken, pigeon)
- Human & animal hair

### BROWNS (CARBON-RICH)

- Hay/ straw
- Shredded newspaper
- Cardboard (ripped pizza boxes & egg cartons)
- Dry leaves & grass clippings
- Old potting soil
- Eggshells

### NOT RECOMMENDED

- Meat, seafood or bones\*
- Dairy products\*
- Oil, fat & grease
- Invasive or bulbous weeds\*
- Cat & dog droppings\*
- Twigs & woody material\*
- Eucalyptus leaves or pine needles\*
- Magazines or glossy paper
- Bleached paper (eg. Tissues, shredded office paper)
- Plastic (including degradable & biodegradable)

\* These materials can go in the green organics bin at home.





## 4.

### LAYERING

You need alternating layers of brown and green materials to make good compost.

- Start with a good layer of browns (15cm) for aeration and drainage. Moisten with water.
- Then add a thin layer of greens (about 5cm), followed by a shovelful of garden soil (to introduce micro-organisms). *Be careful not to add a layer of greens that is too thick, as this will starve the compost of air.*
- Repeat the layering of browns and greens until your compost bin is full. Sprinkle water on the heap if the material is dry.
- When the bin is full, stop adding new materials and allow the material to break down into compost. A second compost bin is very useful for continuing to compost your organic waste once the first compost bin is full.
- A good general ratio in your layers is 3:1 or 70% browns and 30% greens. While not a hard and fast rule, you generally need to add more browns than greens to keep your compost balanced.

**USEFUL TIP** Prepare a bucket or bin of various brown materials like leaves or shredded paper to store next to your compost bin. Every time you add a batch of food scraps, the material will be ready at hand for adding another layer of browns.

## 5.

### MAINTAINING YOUR COMPOST

#### AIR

- Use a garden fork or compost aerator (pictured left) to mix the layers every 1-2 weeks
- Get to the bottom
- Don't forget the sides and corners

#### MOISTURE

Check the moisture level regularly.

Water the pile whenever you add dry materials.

Your compost should be damp but not wet, like a wrung-out sponge.

During summer, placing damp newspaper or hessian on top of the compost pile can stop it from drying out.

#### DIVERSE INGREDIENTS

Add a variety of green and brown materials for better results. The greater the diversity of organic materials, the greater the nutrient content of the compost will be.

Picking up leaves from a park or neighbour can add diversity to your compost.

Size also matters. Your compost system will digest and break down foods faster or slower depending on size of the items. By tearing or cutting big items into smaller pieces (including newspaper and cardboard), you will quicken the composting process.

**TIP**  
More frequent turning or mixing will quicken the composting process.





6.

## HARVESTING THE COMPOST

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The speed of the composting process depends on the volume of material, diversity of ingredients, temperature of the compost, moisture content and airflow. In cold weather the process will be slower. Home compost should be ready in three to six months and it usually looks chunkier and more varied than commercially produced compost.

The compost is ready when it:

1. Looks dark & feels crumbly
2. Smells earthy
3. Doesn't have identifiable food items or leaves

If your compost does not look crumbly, it could just be compacted from the weight of material. By fluffing it up with a garden fork, the compost will separate into a crumbly material ready to use.



7.

## HOW TO USE COMPOST

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1. Lift the bin away from the compost, or empty the compost out of the tumbler.
2. Sift out or put to the side any undecomposed materials. If unfinished compost is applied to the garden, it will take nitrogen from the soil, compromising plant growth.
3. Shovel compost into a bucket or wheelbarrow and transfer to garden beds.
4. Reposition the bin, add the first layer of browns and put back in the undecayed material, ready to start the layering again for a new compost batch.
5. Mix equal amounts of compost and soil to create a new garden bed or potting mix.
6. In vegetable and flower gardens, spread a thin layer of compost as a top dressing and water it before mulching.
7. Compost is too rich for most native plants, but for exotic trees, it can be mixed to a depth of 5cm around the drip line.
8. Lawns can benefit from compost as a top dressing (sifted finer materials are best) to prevent soil erosion and water run-off.
9. You can make a compost tea to water flowers and vegetables by covering the bottom of a watering can with finished compost and filling it up with water. Stir the mixture and allow it to stand for a few hours before use.





## 8.

## SOLVING COMMON PROBLEMS

### Smells

A strong smell is a sign that the compost is out of balance. There is probably too much green and not enough brown material. Add some browns and turn or aerate the compost.

### Pests/ unwelcome critters

Ants, mice and other animals and insects can sometimes make your compost their home. These simple solutions can help get rid of unwelcome critters.

**ANTS AND COCKROACHES** Ants and cockroaches are attracted to warm, dry and undisturbed environments. Add greens, moisture and aerate the compost to deter them.

**MICE AND RATS** Place chicken wire under the base of the bin and fold it up the sides a short distance. Avoid adding grains, bread, sugars and meat.

**FLIES** Small vinegar flies are not a problem for the compost unless they bother you. To reduce their numbers, add browns or cover your top layer with a hessian sack or shredded newspaper. Blowflies or maggots are the result of meat or dairy in the compost. Remove any meat or dairy.

**SPIDERS** Spiders under the lid may be a sign that the compost is too dry or not being turned regularly enough. Wear gloves when handling the lid. Add water and aerate the compost.

### Takes too long to break down

This can happen if your compost is too dry, too wet, or isn't getting enough air. Check the moisture content (including the middle) and if it is too dry, add water. Aerating the compost will increase the temperature and reinvigorate the composting process.

Also if you are only adding small amounts, it will take longer to break down. Adding rich greens such as cow or chicken manure raises the temperature in the compost. Stop adding new materials, leave it to mature, and start a new bin.

### Slimy compost

This indicates there is too much green material, which results in lack of oxygen. Add some browns and turn or aerate the compost.

### SOURCES

*Composting: Environmental Educator Fact Sheet, Department of Environment and Conservation, Waste Authority, WA.*

*Composting at Home Information Booklet, City of West Torrens, SA.*

*A Beginner's Guide to Composting, Foodwise, VIC.*

*Composting Information Fact Sheet, City of Whitehorse, VIC.*

*Composting Information Fact Sheet #2, City of Whitehorse, VIC.*

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

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