

Composting



What?

Composting is nature's way of recycling

Millions of compost critters live and feed on compost, breaking down the organic waste to return valuable nutrients back to the soil

Why?

- Over 50% of waste generated at home is organic matter which can be recycled
- Composting is a cheap and easy way to reduce organic waste at home
- Compost returns vital nutrients back to the soil
- Composting is 100% natural and does not require any expensive artificial fertilisers

Different types of composting systems

Compost Bin: This is the most common type of compost. Compost bins come in many shapes and sizes

Tumblers: Tumbler systems make aerating the compost easy and as a result are usually fast acting composters. However, these bins can be very expensive

Compost Heap: This is a cheap and easy way to compost. Cover the compost heap with hessian, carpet, cardboard, or a layer of mulch and secure with bricks or old lengths of timber

Holding Bays and Multi Bay Units: These can be temporary or permanent structures. Most often they are used for storing green garden waste such as grass clippings, leaves and prunings

Multi Bays work best with at least two bays: one for fresh waste, the other for storing maturing compost until it's ready to use

How?

Composting is easy if you just remember a few key things:

8 steps to successful composting:

Remember to water as you go

1. Learn the **ADAM** principle:
 - **A**liveness – the more micro creatures the better! A compost heap is a living system; it contains millions of micro organisms that act as natural decomposers
 - **D**iversity – make sure the materials you add to your compost are varied. Food scraps, grass clippings, newspaper, straw, seaweed, dust, even toenails!
 - **A**eration – your compost needs air to stay alive. Turning the heap each week with either a garden fork or compost twirler maintains oxygen levels, resulting in a sweet smelling compost
 - **M**oisture – a dry compost heap slows decomposition down, one that is too wet tends to be smelly. Your compost should be as moist as a damp sponge
2. Once you have your bin or have decided which composting system you want to use, select a well-drained sunny position in your backyard where the bin/heap will go
3. Learn the simple **2:1** ratio rule –

2 parts Carbon:1 part Nitrogen, OR 2 parts Brown:1 part Green

Common Carbon (brown) ingredients are – dry materials such as woody plant matter, hay, dry leaves, dried grass clippings or shredded newspaper

Common Nitrogen (green) ingredients are – fresh materials such as recently living plant matter, green lawn clippings, comfrey, food scraps, legumes and chook, cow or horse manure
4. Start with a layer of broken up sticks, twigs, and prunings approximately 20 cm thick. This base layer will help with drainage and aeration
5. Add a layer of compost or rich soil from a previous heap
6. Add alternative layers of Carbon (brown and dry) and Nitrogen (green and juicy)

Composting



- You are ready to start composting! Every time you add your food scraps from now on, make sure you also add something from the carbon (brown) list above
- Cover your compost with a hessian bag, carpet, cardboard or a layer of mulch. If you have a bin ensure the lid stays on

Keep a small bucket/bin in your kitchen to separate your organic waste from other rubbish

You can compost fruit and vegetable scraps, coffee grounds, teabags, egg shells, paper, cardboard, grass clippings, flowers, nail clippings, hair, dust and leaves. Do not put meat, dairy products, or animal droppings in your compost. But you can put in cow, horse or chicken manure

Compost is ready when it is dark, loose and crumbly (this can take anywhere from 4 -12 weeks depending on the bin, site location and ingredients)

Compost can be mixed with sand and used as a potting mix for vegetable or flower seeds as well as indoor plants. It also makes a great lawn-dressing mixture, or a mulch to fertilise plants

Where to go?

Compost bins can be purchased from most Councils, hardware stores and nurseries

How much will it cost?

It's up to you! You can save money and make your own or purchase a ready made system. A standard compost bin will cost you \$30-\$80 or up to \$350 plus for a top of the line tumbler system

Troubleshooting?

By adhering to the **ADAM** principle you can avoid most compost problems

Taking too long to breakdown

Make sure your compost is as moist as a damp sponge and be sure to turn your compost regularly to add oxygen to the heap

Unwelcome critters

To avoid unwanted visitors such as flies and cockroaches ensure your compost is well sealed with a lid or a secure cover. Vinegar flies occur when the compost is too acidic. To fix this add lime, wood ash or dolomite to your heap. Ants in your compost may mean your compost is too dry, add some water if this is the case. Rodents may nest in compost if it is too dry and doesn't get turned regularly

Smelly compost

If your compost is smelly it may be too wet or needs turning. If it is too wet add some dry material such as newspaper or old grass clippings. Remember to turn you compost to add oxygen to the heap

Want to know more?

Download a *How to Compost Easy Guide*

<http://www.resource.nsw.gov.au/publications.htm#easyguide>

Attend a workshop run by your local council:

Camden	4654 7777
Campbelltown	4645 4000
Liverpool	1300 36 2170
Wollondilly	4677 1100
Macarthur Centre for Sustainable Living	4647 9828