

Composting

The material that is left behind from your kitchens can be put to good use by making your own garden composter! The creatures that you have learnt about in the living soil section (i.e. the bacteria, fungi, insects etc), consume and process the plant and animal 'waste'. The great benefits of recycling your organic 'waste' are that you encourage wildlife, save money on fertilizers, reduce pollution, conserve water, reduce landfill and best of all... provide a substrate to grow your own healthy fruit and vegetables on!

What can you compost?

Almost anything that was alive can be composted. Farmyard manure, vegetarian pet manures and bedding (but not dog or cat faeces as they may contain dangerous pathogens), deciduous hedge clippings, spent tea bags, grass mowings, vegetable scraps, and fruit skins etc (dead leaves can be added to the compost or stored separately to make a leaf mould mulch).

What cannot be composted?

Most waste can be composted (~95%), and if it cannot, then it can usually be recycled. Some things not to add to your composter are persistent weeds such as couch grass, and meat and fish, as they tend to attract rodents (rats and mice) and flies. You are also best to leave out citrus fruits as the composting worms (tiger worms) do not like them.



A garden size compost bin. This one is in current use with vegetation being added as it becomes available



The compost in this bin is one year older and will soon be spread on the nearby vegetable plots

Larger scale garden composting



Composting on a large scale.

The right hand bin is currently in use, the left hand one is nearly mature while the centre bin is still being added to for later use once it is mature



Spreading compost around the roots of shrubs. This helps to keep the roots cool and moist as well as providing extra nutrition

Stages in making a composter;

- 1 Collect waste together into a heap
- 2 Cover with an old sheet or bag. (You can make it neater if you make a bin or wooden container for the compost as in photos on these pages.)

An ideal container will have solid sides to keep in the heat and moisture and also a cover to keep out the rain and keep the heat in. Ideally it should be at least 90cm (30 inches) in each direction.

- 3 Site your bin on bare ground where it is easy to access
- 4 Remember you will want to leave your compost to 'mature' so you may want to have a series of 'bins' at various stages of decomposition (see photo on page 87).
- 5 Apply your compost to your garden and watch the fruits of your labour grow!
- 6 Enjoy eating your produce for your dinner

Using compost in containers



Topdressing pots of potatoes with a mulch of compost. This provides extra nutrients for the growing crop and also helps to keep the moisture in

* Did You Know *

The process of using worms to make quality organic matter is sometimes called vermiculture



Harvesting a healthy crop of potato tubers from your pot with compost

*** Did You Know ***

The tiny cream coloured jumping creatures found in compost are called springtails and are good composters of vegetable matter

How does it work?

Composting is fired up through the natural processes of feeding the multitude of soil microbes that invade as soon as you start up your composter. If your household is limited to mainly kitchen scraps grass mowings and some weeds, you can make improved compost by adding in some household paper waste. Paper towels, cardboard boxes, egg boxes, pizza boxes, tubes etc can add 'body' to your compost. Ideally mix paper waste in equal quantities as the vegetation. Remember though to only use paper that cannot be recycled through the paper box!

If you have mainly kitchen waste then add the tiger worms and have a worm composter(see section on how to make your own wormery). If managed properly a worm bin will be smell free and will dispose of your kitchen scraps. The worm casts produced make high quality compost.



Composite of a range of insects found in or on surface of the soil