

Composting

Compost, like humans, needs a balanced diet. A good mix smells pleasant and works with you to improve your soil, to give you healthy flowers and vegetables.

Compost Ingredients	
<i>Recipe: 1 part of "greens" to 1-3 parts of "browns" by volume</i>	
Green Materials (Nitrogen rich)	Brown Materials (Carbon rich)
Grass clippings	Wood chips and sawdust
Garden trimmings	Pine and fir needles
Green leaves	Straw and hay
Manure	Dry grass and leaves
Fruit and vegetable scraps	Nut shells
Coffee grounds and filters	Shredded paper/cardboard
Tea leaves and bags	Cotton

Don't Give Your Compost Indigestion!	
Don't Attract Rats etc.	Don't Compost
<i>For Simple Composting:</i>	Perennial and persistent weeds*
No cooked food	Weed killer treated plants
No meat, bones, fish or dairy products	Cat and dog droppings
	Large logs or branches
	Nappies
	Plastics, metal, glass, etc. that won't break down - use materials that were once "alive"

Compost Containers	
Choose From:	
None (compost heap)	Plastic bins: simple
Chicken wire	Green Cone/Green Johanna
Wood	Bokashi bucket
Bricks	

Composting Method 1 (Cold Heap: Easy, but Slow):

Make a heap over time with a mixture of green and brown materials, and a little soil, or put them in a container. Make sure that there is contact at the bottom with soil or grass. Nature will do the rest.

Materials will compost faster if you can shred them first, but there's no problem if you're not in a hurry: the compost will only get better with time!

Composting Method 2 (Hot Heap: Quicker):

Collect enough material to fill your compost container in one go. Some of this may have been stored in a cool heap and have started to rot slightly. When the heap has cooled, turn the compost, which may heat up again.

Composting Method 3 (German Mound: "Invisible" Composting)

Dig a hole and fill with a balanced mix of green and brown materials. Use the soil from the hole to cover these materials (if you have dug out turf, turn it so that the soil side is uppermost). Plant flowers or vegetables on the top. Shallow rooted plants are best, such as hardy annuals (marigolds, poached egg plants, etc.), radishes, basil. The mound will gradually sink, as the materials compost.

Composting Method 4 (Worm Compost)

No garden, or space for a compost bin/heap? You can compost your kitchen scraps in a wormery. Garden waste cannot be placed in a wormery, but everything else can, including cooked food. Tiger worms inside the wormery eat the food scraps turning them into a fine compost and creating a concentrated liquid feed for your plants.

Composting Method 5 (Green Cone/Green Johanna: Quick)

Buy a Green Cone or Green Johanna composter: they accept all types of food including raw and cooked meat or fish and bones.

Composting Method 6 (Bokashi: Quick)

Bokashi is Japanese for "fermented organic matter". All organic kitchen waste including dairy, meat and cooked foods can be composted, indoors. The simplest way is to buy effective microorganisms (EM), and make the bokashi with molasses, water, EM, and wheat bran. The bokashi bran helps to pickle the organic material and speedily break it down. The pickled material can then be buried in the garden or put in a compost heap. Liquid (known as bokashi juice) is drained off as necessary. Diluted, this liquid can be used as plant food; undiluted, for septic tanks.

*You can compost perennial weeds (e.g. nettles) safely, but make sure they are dead first: bake them; drown them in a bucket of water for at least six weeks; beat them to a pulp with a hammer; or chop them up with a spade

How to Use Your Compost

Mix a 4-6 inch layer of finished compost into newly reclaimed or poor soils. Dig 1-3 inches of compost into garden beds at least once a year.

Mulching: Year-round

In dense plantings, spread compost 1-3 inches thick over soil between plants. To control weeds in open plantings, spread compost 4-6 inches thick over soil around plants. Don't pile compost against plant stems or tree trunks..

On House Plants

Sprinkle a thin layer of compost on the top of house plant soil to provide nutrients. Make a potting soil by mixing compost with soil, sand and other ingredients.

Troubleshooting

- Smelly, slimy heap - Not enough air, turn heap
- Too wet - Add brown material (e.g. dry leaves)
- Too much nitrogen - Add brown material
- Materials are not decomposing - Heap too small - Increase size of heap
- Not enough heat due to lack of green materials or water - Add green materials (e.g., manure or blood and bone) and water
- Materials in heap are too large - Break materials down into small pieces
- Heap may be too dry - add water or more nitrogenous material e.g blood and bone
- Pests attracted to heap e.g., flies, cockroaches, rats, mice - Wrong food added - Don't use meat/bones/ fish. Bury food scraps in centre of heap
- Bin not rodent proof - Rodent-proof your bin (e.g with chicken wire)
- Fruit flies (vinegar flies) - Heap is too acidic - Sprinkle lime on heap
- Ants - Heap is too dry - Add water and lime
- Other "mini-beasts", e.g., beetles, worms - This is not a problem: these creatures are essential to the composting process.
- Compost smells rotten - Not mixed enough or too much nitrogenous matter. Turn the heap and add more dry material. If the decomposing material smells like ammonia or hydrogen sulphide ('rotten eggs') it means that the mixing, loosening and aeration has not worked as it should. Carefully fold and stir to let in air.
- Material too wet and slimy. You may have too many grass clippings. Stir in straw, sawdust (untreated) dry leaves or shredded dry seaweed, twigs or newspaper. Ensure that the site drains well.

Further help

You can get free expert advice from ESCC's team of Compost Doctor's. They offer information leaflets, advice by telephone or email, and group or individual home visits.

Contact a Compost Doctor:

Compost Doctor Service, East Sussex County Council, County Hall, St Anne's Crescent, Lewes BN7 1UE Tel: 01273 482995

Email: compostdoctor@eastsussex.gov.uk