

# COMPOST

## Why waste it? When you can compost it at home.

### COMPOSTING BENEFITS

Composting is an easy, inexpensive and efficient way of reducing your waste by recycling food scraps and garden material. This can be done in your own backyard and has many benefits including:

- Creating healthy gardens by adding valuable nutrients, enhancing the water-holding capacity of soil and reducing water loss through evaporation.
- Reducing plant stress during summer.
- Reducing soil erosion.
- Reducing the amount of organic waste going to landfill and the related greenhouse gases.

### WHAT CAN I PUT IN MY COMPOST?

#### GREEN ORGANIC MATERIALS:

- Fruit and vegetable scraps
- Leaves, flowers and lawn clippings
- Tea leaves and tea bags
- Coffee grounds
- Manure (cow or chicken)

#### BROWN/DRY MATERIALS

- Dry leaves and twigs
- Straw
- Old newspapers (shredded)
- Small amounts of sawdust, ash & lime
- Egg shells (crushed)

### HOW TO GET STARTED

#### 1 CHOOSE YOUR COMPOST BIN

Types include: a standard compost bin (eg. gedye bin), metal or plastic rotating drum (tumbler) or homemade options made from timber pallets and chicken wire or a metal drum with holes in the sides and base removed. You will also need a compost turner and garden fork.

Once you have your materials, composting is simply a matter of adding them to your bin in the right quantities. It's useful to think of your compost like a **lasagne**: you need alternating layers of green and brown materials to create good compost.



#### 2

**FIND THE RIGHT LOCATION** for your compost bin. To make it convenient to use, position your bin so that you have easy access to it from your kitchen. It can be placed both in the sun or the shade; the warmer the location, the faster the compost will work.







**3 CREATE** your **first layer** at the bottom with 'brown dry materials' like straw, dried leaves and twigs. Your **second layer** should include 'green materials' such as clippings, fruit and vegetable scraps or other green materials so that it's roughly the same thickness as your first brown layer. **Repeat** this process of layering and add water to moisten as this encourages bacterial growth which allows your compost to start breaking down.

#### **4 MAINTAINING YOUR COMPOST**

Compost needs **Air + Organic Materials + Micro-organisms + Time**.

To assist the composting process you should:

- Break big materials up into smaller pieces, to allow your compost to break down faster.
- Regularly mix and turn your compost material to allow air flow
- Alternate green and brown materials as required for the system but keep layers thin
- Keep the compost moist

#### **5 HOW TO USE YOUR COMPOST**

It can take between six weeks and six months for the compost to be ready for use. It all depends on the mix of organic materials and how well the compost process is working. The compost is ready to use when all materials added are unrecognisable and it resembles a deep brown, rich and sweet smelling soil. You can tilt the bin and scrape away the finished compost at the bottom, or lift off the bin and start a new pile. Use your compost to feed your plants, spread over your lawn, act as a soil conditioner and a starter for a new compost heap.

## FAQS

### What materials should I keep out of my compost?

Things you should limit the amounts of onions, lemons and acidic materials, as these can be difficult to break down and affect the pH of your compost. Avoid adding meat and dairy products as these can attract rodents and pests, and dog or cat droppings are not suitable for your compost either.

### Why does my compost smell?

A strong smell is a sign that your compost is out of balance. This is often due to a combination of too much moisture and not enough air. **SOLUTION** Turn your compost to make sure it's aerated, then add a layer of dry brown material. Make sure that every time you add kitchen food scraps to your compost, you also add the same amount of 'brown' material. This should keep your compost in balance.

### Rodents are getting into my compost – what can I do?

Rodents can get in by digging holes underneath. **SOLUTION** dig a chicken wire fence into the ground surrounding your compost. Make sure your lid is fully secured and avoid adding foods such as meat and dairy.

### Why isn't my compost breaking down?

This can happen if your compost is too dry, too wet or isn't receiving the amount of air it needs. **SOLUTION** Every time you add material to your compost, make sure you're giving it equal amounts of green and dry materials. If it's too dry (it should produce a drop of liquid when a handful is squeezed), add water until it feels like a moist sponge. If it's too wet, add brown materials like newspaper or straw to help absorb moisture. Also be sure to regularly turn your compost to keep it aerated.

### Why does my compost have flies?

Vinegar flies, which look similar to fruit flies, are not a problem unless they're bothering you. To reduce numbers, try adding a layer of dry, brown material on top of your compost, or you can cover your top layer with a hessian sack or newspaper. Adding lime to your compost should also help.

