HalveWaste
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a guide to

HOME COMPOSTING

From set up to harvesting and much more!

What is composting?

Composting – the transformation of organic matter into a soil-like material called 'compost' – is nature's recycling system.

The process occurs when organisms such as worms, bacteria, fungi, microbes and other living creatures eat through decomposing organic matter to produce a valuable, nutrient-rich food for your garden.

Why compost?

Composting at home is inexpensive and easy. It's benefits include:

- A reduced amount of waste sent to landfill (approximately 40 to 60% of household waste is compostable);
- Reduced production of methane, a powerful greenhouse gas;
- Improved soil health, structure and ability to hold water;
- Increased disease resistance in plants;
- Reduced dependence on artificial fertilisers and pesticides; and
- It can save you money!

What you *can* compost

Most organic material can be composted. If you add a diverse range of both nitrogen and carbon-rich ingredients to your compost bin you will produce beautiful, nutrient-rich compost.

Materials that can be composted include:

✓ **Nitrogen-rich kitchen wastes**

Fruit scraps, vegetable peelings, house plant cuttings, coffee grounds, rice and pasta, egg shells, tea bags, vacuum dust and hair.

✓ **Carbon-rich kitchen wastes**

Coffee filters, bread, paper napkins and towels, clothes dryer lint, hair, egg cartons and torn up pizza boxes.

✓ **Nitrogen-rich garden wastes**

Flowers, vegetables, plant trimmings, hedge clippings, grass clippings, horse and chicken or cow manure.

✓ **Carbon-rich garden wastes**

Leaves, straw or hay, small twigs, mulch, dried grass and weeds.

What You *can't* compost

It is recommended that you do not compost animal products. Although these items can be composted they can cause problems if not composted correctly.

Materials that should not be composted include:

✗ **Meat, fish or bones**

✗ **Dairy products**

✗ **Oils or fats**

✗ **Chemicals**

✗ **Dog, cat or human faeces**

✗ **Diseased plants**

✗ **Mature weeds with seeds**

✗ **Ashes**

Setting up your compost bin

1. Position your compost bin in an area with good drainage.
2. Place some fine chicken wire under the bin, fold up the sides and tie. This will prevent vermin gaining acess to your compost.
3. Start with a 20-30cm layer of coarse, carbon-rich garden waste like small twigs, sticks, and mulch. This material will allow good drainage and aeration.
4. Water this layer well.
5. Add 2-3 shovels of finished compost or 'live' soil from your garden. This will add essential living organisms to your compost.
6. Add food scraps from your kitchen tidy bin (chop bulky items such as watermelon rinds and corn cobs into smaller pieces to assist the composting process).
7. For every addition of nitrogen-rich food scraps, add the same amount of carbon-rich material i.e. one bucket of food scraps to one bucket of leaves, straw and mulch.
8. Mix the contents of the compost bin with a spiral compost tool or pitch fork.
9. Add water to ensure the mixture stays moist.
10. Always cover any exposed food scraps with a few handfuls of carbon-rich material like leaves or mulch. This helps to reduce flies.
11. Cover the compost with a compost 'blanket' (such as a damp hessian sack or newspaper) and keep the bin lid on. This will keep it moist and dark, allowing worms and other living organisms to thrive.

Maintaining your compost

Always keep in mind the A.D.A.M. principle when composting:

A for Aliveness

Compost is a living system in which organisms such as worms, bacteria, fungi, microbes and other creatures eat through decomposing organic waste.

D for Diversity

Adding a diverse range of ingredients will result in a balanced, nutrient-rich compost.

A for Aeration

Air is important for the beneficial bacteria in compost and also helps keep odours at bay. Aerate your compost by turning it at least once every two weeks.

M for Moisture

Moisture is required to keep compost 'alive' and to help it break down faster. Keep your compost moist (but not wet) for best results.

Other useful tips

- Add a handful of dolomite once a month to balance acidity.
- When your compost bin is full it should be left to mature for 6-8 weeks. During this time be sure to keep the compost moist and turn it regularly.
- Start a second compost bin!

Harvesting your compost

1. Your compost is ready to use when it is a rich dark colour and has a mild earthy smell (with no ammonia smell).
2. Carefully lift the compost bin up and off the pile.
3. Remove any unfinished compost and set aside.
4. Use the finished compost as desired.
5. Replace the compost bin in its original footprint.
6. Start building a new pile using the unfinished compost.

Using your compost

- Dig into flower and vegetable gardens to a depth of about 5cm.
- Apply to the surface of garden beds as mulch to reduce water usage. Try to keep it away from plant stems (especially seedlings).
- Use as top dressing on your lawn.
- Spread between rows of plants and vegetables.

Compost Troubleshooting

Problem	Cause	Solution
Compost smells	• Too wet. • Insufficient oxygen.	• Add more carbon-rich material to provide air pockets. • Turn compost more often to increase aeration. • Sprinkle with dolomite to reduce acidity.
Compost is attracting vermin	• Too acidic. • Meat, fish, dairy or faeces in compost. • Too much bread in compost. • Insufficient moisture.	• Place chicken wire under bin –refer to 'Setting up your compost bin' inside. • Cover the compost with a damp hessian sack or newspaper and keep the bin lid on. • Keep the compost moist –vermin do not like a damp environment. • Turn compost more often –vermin do not like disturbance. • Sprinkle with dolomite. • Reduce the amount of meat, fish, dairy and bread in compost.
Slow decomposition	• Insufficient oxygen. • Insufficient moisture. • Unbalanced mix of ingredients. • Cold weather.	• Add more nitrogen-rich material e.g. manure, grass clippings, blood & bone. • Check moisture and add water if required – dry compost will not heat up. • Turn compost more often. • Sprinkle with dolomite.

notes

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