

Food and vegetable waste makes up about a third of the contents of our dustbins. It contains up to 90% water and thus burns very badly. Separated from other waste however, it can be composted and be of great use in agriculture and gardening. You can either compost food waste yourself or place it in biodegradable bin. Home composting is the most environmentally-friendly way of dealing with kitchen and garden waste, plus it produces compost that can be used as an excellent soil improver.

## What can be composted?



Kitchen and garden waste are best for making compost. To make good compost, you need a mix of materials that are rich in nitrogen and carbon. Nitrogen comes from lush, green material such as grass clippings. Carbon comes from brown material, such as woody stems and cardboard.

## Types of Compost



**Cold Composting:** It is a regular composting, involves placing a variety of organic materials in a compost bin, enclosure, or even just in a large heap, and leaving it there until it breaks down several months later. It's a very slow process and typically takes 6 to 12 months. It does not destroy pathogens either.



**Hot composting:** This method produces compost in a much shorter time. It has the benefits of killing weed seeds and pathogens (diseases), and breaking down the material into very fine compost. This method also known as Berkeley method, developed by the University of California, Berkley, is a fast, efficient, high-temperature, composting technique which produces high quality compost in 18 days.

## What to add to your compost bin - and what to leave out

### Green Materials

Fruit/ Vegetable scraps	Eggshells	Coffee grounds
Grass and plant clippings	Tea leaves/bags	Flowers, Garden waste&Green Leaves

### Brown Materials

Dry leaves	Finely chopped wood and bark chips,	Shredded newspaper
Straw	Sawdust from untreated wood	Cardboard
Paper Towels/bags	Dead house plants	

### Never Compost With:

Anything containing meat materials	Glossy/Coloured/Printed paper	Sawdust or chips from pressure-treated wood	Oil, fat, or grease	Weeds that go to seed	Cooked food	Diseased plant	Dairy products	Dog or cat feces
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## When to compost

It is done round the year, as and when suitable materials are generated in the garden or home. However late summer to early winter is the peak time for making compost.

## How to compost

### Step 1 - Choose Your Type of Compost Bin

You can make a bin using wooden pallets or corrugated iron. Enclosed one will retain heat and speed up the rotting process. Larger the pile, the more heat. The ideal minimum size is 1mx1m.



A plastic compost bin is ideal for a small space. The plastic sides and lid retain moisture and heat to encourage rapid decomposition.

### Step 2 - Choose Your Composter Location

A sunny corner of the garden is the best location. Better if it is flat and well-drained. It should be in a convenient location



### Step 3 - Right balance of composting materials

Start with a layer of course materials (like twigs) to allow for drainage and aeration. Cover this layer with leaves. Then make alternate layers of greens materials (nitrogen-rich material) and browns (carbon-rich material).



#### Step 4 - Do Not Add to Your Compost

There are a number of materials that you should keep out of your compost pile.

#### Step 5 - Making Compost with alternate layer

If we add a thin layer of finished compost or good garden soil between brown and green layer, it will increase the process of conversion and will make better compost. Moisten each layer by misting it lightly with a garden hose.



#### Step 6 - Continue to Add Layers until Bin is Full

The bin contents/pile will shrink as it begins to decompose. So continue to add kitchen and yard waste as they accumulate. Once it is full bin, turn the pile weekly. The more you turn the pile the faster you will have finished compost!



#### Step 7 - Harvest your Compost

Active composting period ranges between 14 days to six months. Mature compost will be dark brown, with a crumbly soil-like texture and a smell resembling damp woodland. Remove all the finished compost from the bin, leaving unfinished materials in the bin to continue decomposing.

#### Step 8 - Use of Compost

- Dress your lawn a few times a year.
- Use as top dressing for flower/vegetable beds and at the base of trees and shrubs.
- Mix compost in with garden and flower bed soil.
- Use as a soil conditioner when planting or transplanting trees, flowers and shrubs by filling the hole with half compost and half soil.
- Make 'compost tea.' Fill cheese cloth or an old pillowcase with 1 litre of compost. Tie the top and 'steep' the bag for a variable period (24-48 hours) in a garbage bin filled with water. This 'undiluted tea' can be used to water plants and gardens or as a spray to plant parts.



#### Step 9 -How to Make Even Better Compost!

**Optimal Balance of Compost Materials:** In order to keep the bacteria working efficiently supply them with a mixture that is about 30 parts carbon to 1 part nitrogen



**Turn the Compost More Often:** Adding of fresh oxygen helps the bacteria to break down the content

**Check the Moisture Level of Compost:** Between 50-60% is desirable in an active compost pile

**Berkeley Method of "fast composting":** This method produces finished compost in as little as 14 to 21 days

**Adding an activator:** Alfalfa meal to compost provides the much needed nitrogen and protein

**Worm Compost Bin for Food Scraps:** It can be done indoors and outdoors, allowing for year round composting. Food waste and the worms and micro-organisms eventually convert the entire contents into rich compost.

#### Step 10 - Teach others how to make Compost!

**Sometimes** the results of composting are not as expected. We face problems.

**Wet, slimy and strong-smelling compost:** Too much water and too little air are the reasons. Cover the heap to protect against rain and add more brown waste, such as chopped woody material, shredded woodchip, straw or paper.

**Dry and fibrous with little rotting:** Usually caused by too little moisture and too much brown material. Add more green waste, or try a commercial activator or accelerator such as 'Garotta'. Alternatively, add fresh manure at one bucket for every 15cm (6in) layer of compost, fish, blood and bone fertiliser at 270g (9oz) per 15cm (6in) layer of compost, or sulphate of ammonia fertiliser at 140g (5oz) per 15cm (6in) layer of compost.

**Flies:** Well-run compost bins don't produce swarms of flies, but if you do see these, then make sure you cover kitchen waste with garden waste after adding it to the heap and check that moisture levels are not too high, causing insufficient air in the heap.

**Source:** <http://www.bhg.com/gardening/yard/compost/how-to-compost/>

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