

Join the **Compost** **Revolution**



Composting

In a compost bin, air-breathing microorganisms break down your waste and create heat. A compost bin can handle more food scraps than a worm farm. You will need an outdoor space and garden cuttings to mix in with your food scraps.

Contents

The basics	2
The perfect home	6
A balanced diet	11
Feeding your compost	16
Avoiding problems	22
Harvest time	29

1 The basics

How do you turn your food and garden scraps into rich, healthy compost?

Worms, fungi, good bacteria and other tiny creatures do the work for you. The secret of healthy compost is to feed your workers and keep them happy.

1 The basics



A healthy compost system needs: food, air, moisture and a good location.

1 The basics



Tips

Home – Set up your compost in a sheltered spot with good drainage and lots of sun.

Balanced diet – Feed your compost a 50/50 mix of food scraps and gardens scraps.

Air – Help your compost to breathe by stirring it every time you feed it.

Moisture – Add dry materials or water as needed to keep your compost moist, but not too wet.

1 The basics



Did you know?

It's best to avoid food waste in the first place.

One way to do this is to plan your weekly meals in advance. This will allow you to save money because you'll only be purchasing the ingredients that you need.

To learn more visit:

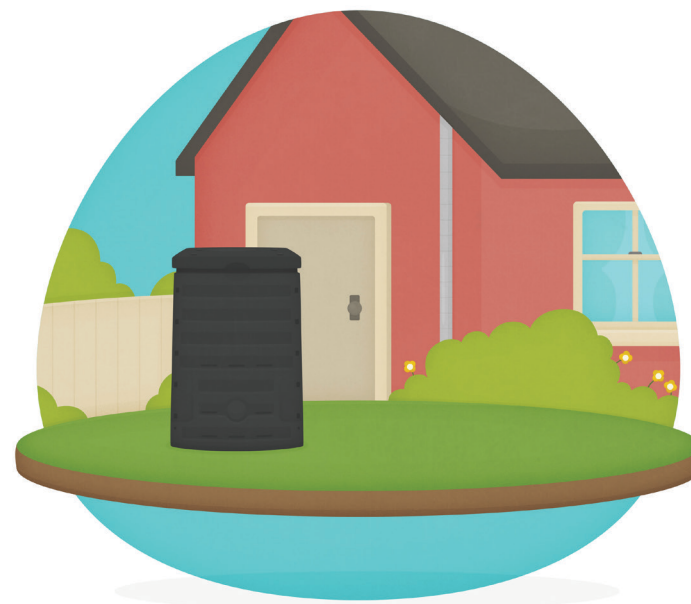
Love Food Hate Waste Website
lovefoodhatewaste.nsw.gov.au

Food Lovers Republic
foodloversrepublic.com.au

② The perfect home

Install your compost bin on bare earth with good drainage and find a spot that is conveniently located, so that you can access it easily.

② The perfect home



Choose a spot

Keep your bin close to your house so it's convenient to empty your scraps. Position it away from windows and neighbours. Compost breaks down faster in the sun, but requires less stirring in the shade.

② The perfect home



Good drainage

Good drainage is best. Place your compost on soil, sand or gravel that drains well. Avoid sealed surfaces like concrete because this will lead to soggy, smelly compost.

② The perfect home



Add woodchips or mulch

To get started, place a 30 cm layer of woodchips or mulched dry garden scraps in the base of the bin to help drainage.

2 The perfect home



Tips

Make your compost bin rat-proof by lining it with chicken wire. Place the open base of your bin on top of a piece of chicken wire, bend it up around the outside of the bin and tie in place with rope.

Got a friend with a compost bin or worm farm? Grab a handful of their compost or worm tea to give your compost a kick-start.

Did you know?

Worms generally find their way into compost bins and improve the soil by aerating it. They also break down nutrients in the soil, letting plants in your garden absorb them more easily.

3 A balanced diet

Your compost needs a 50/50 balance of food scraps and garden scraps. For every bucket of food scraps, you'll need to add one bucket of garden scraps.

③ A balanced diet



Food scraps

All food and drink scraps including chilli, garlic, citrus, grains, dairy and tiny amounts of meat. Food scraps are wet and high in nitrogen which helps compost break down. Substitutes include: manure, fresh grass clippings and seaweed.

③ A balanced diet



Garden scraps

All grass and plant clippings, leaves, mulch and wood chips. Garden scraps are dry and high in carbon so they'll stop your compost from smelling. Substitutes include: shredded paper, cardboard, coffee husks and grain husks.

③ A balanced diet



Things to avoid

Avoid adding more than 100g of meat, tofu, dairy, eggs or oils at one time. Technically anything organic (once living) can be composted. However, in a small backyard compost bin it's best to be careful and follow these guidelines.

③ A balanced diet



Tips

- ✓ Diversity is the key. Too much of one thing can cause an imbalance in your compost.
- ✓ Chop food scraps and garden scraps into pieces smaller than a golf ball. The smaller the pieces the faster they will break down

Did you know?

Weeds can be composted but you probably don't want their seeds to grow in your garden.

Kill the seeds before you compost them by soaking the weeds in a tub of water for a month or two. They'll break into a rich sludge that you can use in your compost as a substitute for food scraps.

4 Feeding your compost

The key to good composting is as simple as:
Food! Stir! Garden!

This formula is the easiest way to ensure your compost has a balanced diet and gets plenty of air through regular stirring and tossing. This helps to manage the moisture levels in your compost by balancing wet food scraps with dry garden scraps.

4 Feeding your compost



Food!

Keep a container or bucket in your kitchen to collect food and drink scraps. Empty the container into your compost bin every few days.

④ Feeding your compost



Stir!

Keep your stirrer next to the compost and turn it every time you add food scraps. Sink your stirrer into the top 2/3 of your compost and pull it up several times, “tossing” the food scraps and letting fresh air in.

④ Feeding your compost



Garden!

Scatter a bucket of garden scraps or clippings across the top every time. This keeps the top of the compost neat and deters vermin. The garden scraps will be mixed through next time you turn the compost.

4 Feeding your compost



Tips

- ✓ Store collected garden scraps and clippings next to your compost so they are available when you need them.
- ✓ Use your kitchen scraps bucket to scoop garden scraps from your stockpile into your compost. This helps ensure equal quantities.

4 Feeding your compost



Did you know?

Cold composting – The method above is called “cold” composting. It’s the most convenient way to compost your food scraps regularly. The compost does generate heat but because scraps are added gradually it won’t get really hot. It will take 3 to 6 months for the compost to be ready.

Hot composting – This is when you fill the compost bin in layers all at once and leave it to “cook” stirring and adding water occasionally. This will create compost in 6 to 10 weeks.

Gardeners sometimes use both methods; establishing a “hot” compost that is filled to the top and left to cook, as well as a “cold” compost that they add scraps to regularly.

5 Avoiding problems

5 Avoiding problems

Composting is very easy and you won't have any problems if you "Food, Stir, Garden" every time. But, in our complex world things don't always go to plan. Here's how to fix any problems that might come up.



Bad smells

If it smells then it probably hasn't been stirred enough and is too wet. Give the whole compost a good stir for aeration and add more garden scraps. If smells are strong, sprinkle ash, dolomite or garden lime on top.

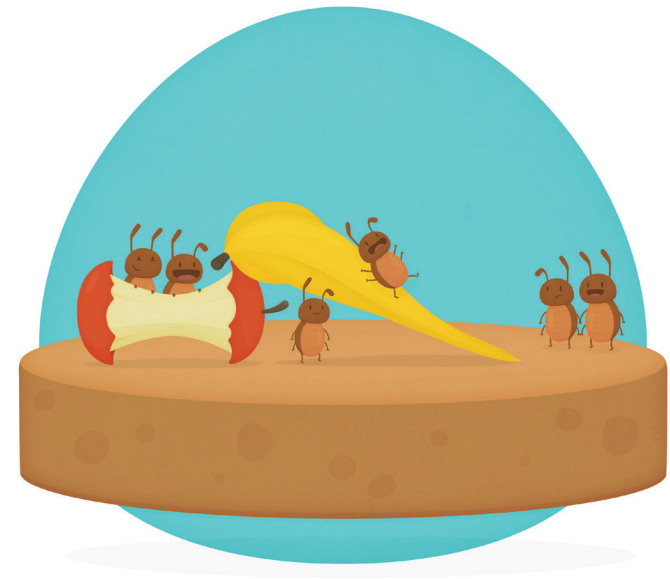
5 Avoiding problems



Too slow to break down!

It is probably too dry or cold. If the compost is dry, soak it with a hose. Adding more food scraps or moving your compost to a warmer spot will speed things up.

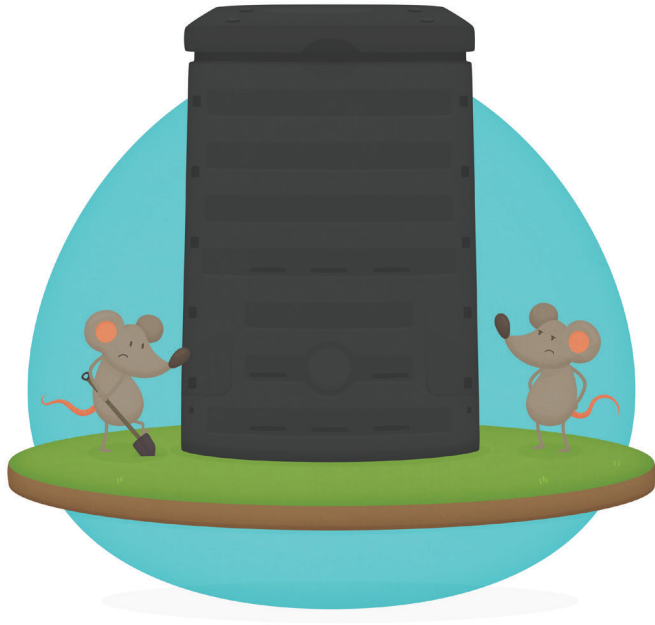
5 Avoiding problems



Cockroaches

They hide in warm, dry, still patches. Soak your compost with a hose, then “toss” thoroughly using your stirrer. Only add garden scraps when you “Food, Stir, Garden” to avoid dry patches forming.

5 Avoiding problems



Mice and rats

They could be attracted to your compost if it smells. Avoid adding grains, meat, eggs and dairy. Check the lid is secure and there are no gaps. Rat-proof your bin by lining the base with chicken wire.

5 Avoiding problems



Soldier fly larvae

Often confused with maggots, larvae are bigger, browner and more segmented. They help break down compost faster and aren't a problem. There's no easy way to remove them. Just stir more often, add more garden scraps and they'll leave in a few weeks.

5 Avoiding problems



Tips

Keeping your microbial workers happy is the secret to composting. If you have a problem, think about what might be imbalanced in terms of their home, diet, air and moisture.

Remember to avoid feeding your compost:

- ✓ Strong, scented leaves from eucalypts or pines because they can slow things down by “fumigating” your workers.
- ✓ Too many animal products or carbohydrates. This can cause the bin to smell and can attract vermin.

6 Harvest time

Your compost is ready to harvest if it looks like dark, rich soil and smells earthy. This normally takes 3 to 6 months. Spread the compost around plants or mix it with soil to create your own potting mix. Always cover soil and compost with a layer of mulch to keep it alive and thriving.

⑥ Harvest time



Harvest from the bottom

The newer food scraps on the top may not have broken down, so harvest your compost from the bottom of the bin. Any scraps that haven't broken down yet can be thrown back in.

⑥ Harvest time



Getting the compost out

If your bin has a trap door - open it and scrape the compost out with a shovel. No door? Tilt the bin to one side and scrape it out with a shovel.

6 Harvest time



Emptying the whole bin

Depending on your bin model you may be able to lift the whole bin off the pile and use the harvested compost on your garden. Any scraps that have not broken down can be thrown back in to kick start your new compost.

6 Harvest time



Tips

Compost is always good for vegetables and exotic plants, but is often too rich for native plants. A common harvesting problem is finding small patches of “ready” compost mixed with recently-added food scraps. This can be avoided by only stirring the top half of your compost, allowing the “ready” compost to accumulate at the bottom.

Don’t worry about eggshells or avocado seeds not breaking down. If the rest of the compost is black, fluffy and smells earthy then it’s okay. The eggshells won’t be visible in your garden once you add a layer of mulch over the top.

If it’s not quite ready to harvest but you want to start another compost - lift the bin off the compost pile, cover it with a tarp or rug and leave it for a few weeks until it’s ready.

6 Harvest time



Did you know?

Your backyard compost is unlikely to get hot enough to kill seeds. If plants like tomatoes and pumpkins sprout where you don't want them, just pull them out and throw them back into the compost or replant them in a vegie garden.

Recycle your food scraps!

Get a discounted compost bin or worm farm from your council and reduce what you send to landfill by half.

Composting at home is easy to do and avoids transporting food scraps to landfill where they produce harmful greenhouse gases as they break down. Our quick tutorial will show you how to recycle your food scraps, reduce your environmental footprint and make rich fertiliser for your garden.

www.compostrevolution.com.au

This project was supported by the Environmental Trust as part of the NSW EPA's Waste Less, Recycle More initiative, funded from the waste levy.

