WHAT TO USE

Covered heap

A covered heap is useful for large quantities of compost. The heap should be enclosed using bricks or timber. The best dimensions are between 1-2 metres wide and 1 metre high. Leave an access area at the front of the heap for turning the compost and cover it with a piece of carpet or hessian bags. These allow airflow, prevent excess drying and keep pests out. Two heaps allow material to mature in one while composting in the other.

Compost bin

Compost bins are better for smaller suburban gardens. Plastic bins can be purchased from nurseries, hardware stores and local councils. They should be open at the bottom with the top requiring a tight-fitting lid. Ensure the bin you use has holes in the sides for aeration - not in the top - so you can control the amount of moisture. Avoid placing the bin or heap too close to your house. Two bins allow material to mature in one while composting in the other.

Compost tumbler

Compost tumblers are better for smaller gardens. They consist of a barrel which is held off the ground to enable it to be turned for aeration. With the increased aeration they often produce compost quicker than other methods. They are also less likely to have rodents and fly problems as they are fully enclosed apart from vents which allow air in.

TROUBLESHOOTING

Compost bin smells	**Problem:** Compost pile is too wet or is not receiving enough air. **Solution:** Turn the compost. If it is too wet mix in some brown material such as dry leaves or shredded garden organics
Bin contents have turned slimy	**Problem:** Too much green material added. Poor structure results in inadequate aeration and may produce odour. **Solution:** Add brown materials e.g. dry leaves. Reduce amount of green material added. Turn the compost.
Centre of pile is dry	**Problem:** Not enough water. **Solution:** Add water or green material. Mix well and turn compost.
Pests	**Problem:** Acidic and smelly heap due to too much green material or food scraps are left exposed on top of the pile. **Solution:** Ensure scraps are covered when added. Add garden lime and brown material and turn the heap.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

See the brochure "Sustainable Gardening Using Compost" for information on where and how to apply compost in your garden.

Visit the ZeroWaste WA website:
www.zerowastewa.com.au

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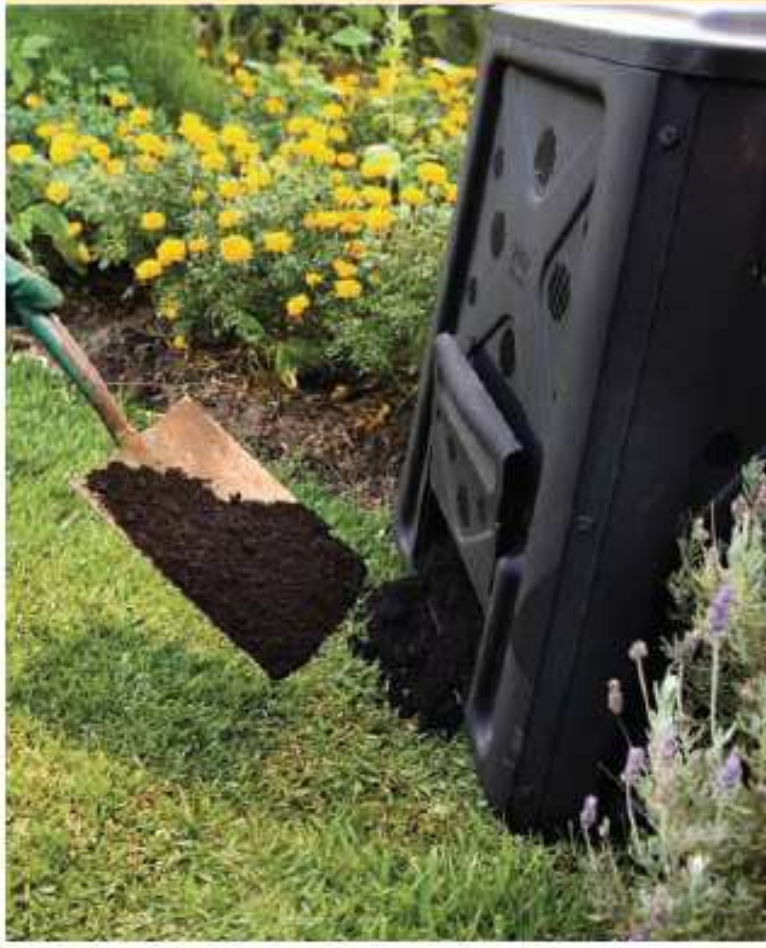
Home Composting



Department of Environment and Conservation

WHAT IS COMPOSTING?

Home composting is a simple process that assists in the breakdown of organic matter - such as food scraps and garden organics - into a nutrient rich soil-like material that can be used to create and maintain a healthy and sustainable garden.

WHAT CAN BE COMPOSTED?

Yes ✔

Vegetable and fruit scraps
Tea leaves & tea bags
Coffee grounds
Crushed egg shells
Paper & cardboard (shredded)
Leaves and twigs
Sawdust

No ✘

Animal droppings
Meat products
Fish
Nappies
Plastic
Glass
Metal

FOUR EASY STEPS

1) Find a location

The compost heap/bin should be placed directly onto the soil in a sunny spot.

2) Add starting materials

Start with a good layer of woody or nutrient poor ('brown') materials such as leaves or shredded garden organics on the very bottom of the heap/bin. Then place alternate layers of food scraps ('greens'), manure or grass clippings with shallow layers of leaves or shredded garden organics. Add water if the composting material is dry.

3) Maintain

Keep the heap/bin moist but not too wet. When adding food scraps, place them at the centre of the heap/bin where the temperature is the highest. This also helps to keep out pests. Turn the compost about once a week to increase aeration.

4) Harvest - is my compost ready for use?

Home compost should be ready in three to six months and will be visibly different from commercially produced compost. Sieve out any undecomposed parts. Fluff up any wet compacted compost with a garden fork to separate it into a crumbly texture ready for use.

Signs of mature compost are:

- It smells earthy - not sour, putrid or like ammonia
- It has a dark brown texture which looks like soil
- It's crumbly, and doesn't have identifiable food items, leaves or grass.

COMPOST PRINCIPLES

Essential components of a healthy compost are air, balanced materials and moisture.

Balanced materials

Carbon based 'browns' provide structure. These are drier, fibrous and include paper, cardboard and woody prunings. Nitrogen based 'greens' provide moisture and nitrogen. These are soft, moist and include most food scraps, grass clippings and weeds.

Water

A compost heap should contain 40-60% moisture with material feeling as damp as a wrung out sponge.

Air

Air gaps in the material are essential to prevent low oxygen (anaerobic) conditions, which causes unpleasant smells.