

Composting

Composting is the oldest method of recycling. It's a great way of turning green wastes into rich, crumbly compost for your garden.

How to Be a Rotter

You can make your compost heap on the ground, or you could build a box. This will keep the heap dry, warm and tidy.

Build your heap quickly. Collect green materials for a week or two until you have enough for a small heap. See our list below for what you can use. Then build a heap in one day. Bits and pieces can be added as the heap sinks down.

Mix a variety of materials together. Avoid putting too many rough stems and twigs in the mix as they are very slow to break down. Grass cuttings are useful, but mix them in well with leaves, kitchen waste and stems or they will form a sludgy mess.

Put the heap where it will stay moist (but not wet). Shady spots are best. Cover the heap with a bit of old carpet or a sheet of polythene- this helps it stay warm and stops it getting soaked. If it gets too wet it may start to smell.

Try using an activator. This is a chemical that helps gets the composting process started. Your garden centre sells them, but grass cuttings also make good activators.

Some composters recommend that the heap is turned once to ensure that everything gets a turn in the middle of the pile.

Micro-recyclers need to breathe! To allow air to circulate through the heap, make a base from two rows of bricks covered with sticks and twigs. Firm down the heap, but don't squash it completely. You want to leave small air spaces in it.

Be patient! In ideal conditions compost may be ready to use within 2 months, however, you will probably have to wait longer than this.

Ingredients for compost

•Vegetables and fruit peelings • tea leaves •weeds •grass cuttings • Hair from the pet or family •paper • Horse manure •leaves •prunings • straw and hay (soaked well if dry)

How to use your compost

Compost is ready to use when all the ingredients have turned into a dark crumbly mixture with an earthy smell. Dig it into your garden soil to refresh its structure and replace lost nutrients. Spread it around plants to keep moisture in the soil, protect it from frost and stop weeds. Mix it in well with garden soil (about half and half) to make potting compost for houseplants. Any spare? Give it to your friends and neighbours.