

What is composting?

Composting is the biodegradation of organic wastes such as food scraps and garden waste, which can be done at home to improve soil fertility and the health of your garden.

Why is composting important?

The average Australian will produce approximately 180kg of organic waste per year². Where this waste is being placed in the conventional household 'garbage' bin, it is being sent direct to landfill. The degradation of organics in a landfill environment (anaerobic degradation) produces methane gas, which is a potent greenhouse gas. This consumes valuable landfill space and can create amenity issues such as bad odours.

Benefits of composting:

Household composting has many benefits both for the environment and for the composter¹:

- ✓ Reduce the amount of organic waste going to landfill, minimising methane emissions and other associated problems of organics in landfill.
- ✓ Application of composted organics to plants improves growth and disease resistance, producing an organic/biodynamic fertiliser promoting healthy gardens
- ✓ Compost helps to improve water infiltration and drainage in clayey soils, minimising runoff and erosion
- ✓ Improves water retention in sandy soils
- ✓ Improves filtration of infiltrating rain, helping to improve water quality within the catchment

What materials can I compost?

Many household organic materials can be composted in a household compost bin, including³:

- ✓ Food scraps – vegetable and fruit scraps, egg shells etc.
- ✓ Tea leaves/bags and coffee grounds
- ✓ Garden wastes – prunings, weeds, straw, grass clippings, leaves and weeds
- ✓ Shredded paper/newspaper and cardboard
- ✓ Ash from the fire and sawdust
- ✓ Cow, horse and chicken manure



What materials can't I compost?

Many items need to be recycled through other means, or even disposed into landfill. Some items that **cannot** be placed in a compost bin are³:

- Man made items such as plastic, steel, aluminium and glass
- Meat scraps or bones
- Cat and dog droppings

Where to get a compost bin?

Simple composting bins can be bought at low cost from local retailers and hardware stores, but can even be made at home using old recycled/reused materials such as³:

- Old plastic bins with ventilation holes drilled/cut into them
- Metal drums with holes drilled into them and the bottom removed

How to use my compost bin effectively?

Once you have bought or created your compost bin, it is easy to begin composting your organic waste. For a compost to degrade effectively to produce nutrient rich compost which can be used in the garden, you will need to add about 2 parts of green or “wet” waste to 3 parts of brown or “dry” waste².

Green or “wet” waste items	Brown or “dry” waste items
<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Green leaves, soft prunings and grass clippings○ Fruit and vegetable scraps○ Tea bags	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Autumn/dry leaves○ Shredded paper/newspaper○ Twigs and sticks○ Sawdust or wood shavings○ Dry garden soil○ Egg shells○ Cardboard including egg cartons and pizza boxes○ Dust from the vacuum cleaner○ Ash from your fire

Your compost bin should be located in an area which is relatively shady, then add alternating layers of green and brown waste. This will need to be aerated or mixed every 1-2 weeks, and after around four months, when the compost is dark in colour and rich in organic matter it is ready to be used on the garden³. For soil which is sandy or clayey, you may choose to dig the compost into the soil, as this will enhance drainage in the clayey soil and water retention in sandy soil. Otherwise it can be spread along the top of the garden to add nutrients and prevent weeds and erosion.

For more information/references:

¹Clean Up Australia 2015, *Composting Fact Sheet*, Royal Exchange NSW, viewed 5th January 2016, <http://www.cleanup.org.au/files/clean_up_australia_composting_factsheet.pdf>.

²ABC – Gardening Australia 2008, *Fact Sheet: Clever Composting*, Melbourne, viewed 5th January 2016, <<http://www.abc.net.au/gardening/stories/s2280642.htm>>.

³NSW Office of Environment and Heritage 2013, *Composting Factsheet*, Sydney, viewed 5th January 2016, <<http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/resources/households/130717-Composting.pdf>>.