



Compost bins

Compost is one of the most important supplements you can give your garden, and especially your vegetable garden. It's a simple way to add nutrient rich humus to your soil. It's easy to make, it's free and it's fantastic for your garden.

What is compost?

Compost is a mixture of decayed organic matter which, when added to soil, increases its nutrient content. It improves soil structure and its water holding capacity.

Compost bins


There are many varieties of compost bins available now in hardware stores and garden centers. Buying the plastic bins may be a simple option and it may even be more cost effective than making a more serious 3 chamber timber compost bin.

In practice any container can be used for composting. Old garbage bins are popular. However, if you choose to use a plastic compost bin, makes sure it has enough ventilation. If necessary, you may drill some holes in the sides to allow cross-ventilation.

It may require more work to construct, but a 3 chamber timber bin is a terrific system. It is well ventilated and it will allow you to have 3 levels of compost on the go at the same time. Once you have filled the first chamber you move on to the next one while the first chamber matures and so

on. By the time you start using the 3rd chamber, the first one will be ready for use in the garden. If you don't want to build a 3 chamber compost bin you can have 3 plastic bins that are used in the same way.

You can also dig a hole in the ground to use as a compost bin.



Composting addresses the Permaculture Principles 'obtain a yield', 'use and value renewable resources' and 'produce no waste'.

Compost helps your vegetables to grow for an abundant harvest. The ingredients of compost are all renewable resources. By composting them you are restoring natural nutrient cycles and improving your soil. Adding materials like kitchen and garden waste to your compost instead of putting them in the rubbish bin means your household produces less waste.

Making compost

Regardless of which container you choose, the process will be the same.

Build your compost in alternate layers of dry matter, green kitchen and garden waste, nitrogen-rich animal manures and soil.

First place a layer of dry matter such as leaves or straw at the bottom of your container. Then start filling with your kitchen and garden waste. Once you have a layer of scraps, add another layer of soil or straw and continue layering in this way. This will accelerate the composting process and will prevent the compost going 'off'.

If the compost is too moist it will produce a bad smell. You will need to add dry matter to balance it and mix well. However, you do not want your compost to dry out either. This will kill the worms and stop microbial activity, and the compost will not be useful.

It is important to turn over your compost regularly using a pitchfork or shovel.

Your compost is ready once it turns into sweet-smelling nice dark soil.

Benefits of composting

- Great for the environment.
- Free soil conditioner which helps your plants grow and helps retain moisture in the soil.
- Reduces landfill.
- Recycles kitchen and garden waste.

- Introduces important organisms into your soil and boosts the local worm population. These are essential for good soil health.

What should you compost?

- Scraps from the table.
- Vegetable and fruit scraps.
- Egg shells.
- Leaves.
- Grass clippings.
- Straw.
- Coffee grounds and tea leaves.
- Animal manures (especially from chickens and sheep).
- Garden plants.
- Newspaper and shredded paper.
- Weeds (although be careful of those with persistent seeds)
- Other organic matter.

Things to avoid composting:

- Meat, bones and fish scraps (as they will attract pests).
- Diseased plants (e.g. curly leaf) and fruits.
- Pet manure.
- Treated wood.
- Fatty food waste.
- Citrus peel (worms don't like it, and you want to make your worms happy!!!).

Enjoy composting!

For further information on this topic contact

Canberra Organic Growers Society www.cogs.asn.au

Canberra Environment Centre www.ecoaction.com.au
