

YOUR EASY GUIDE TO COMPOSTING

Did you know the average red lidded waste bin in the City of Canada Bay contains more than 50% food waste? We send almost 8000 tonnes of food waste to landfill each year, which leads to the production of methane, a potent greenhouse gas. Help us reduce the amount of food waste sent to landfill by composting.

What is composting?

Composting is the aerobic decomposition of organic materials and conversion to a rich hummus or compost which is beneficial to soil and plants. When we add compost to soil we:

- Increase its ability to absorb carbon from the atmosphere
- Increase water retention by an average of 30%
- Improve overall soil quality and nutrient content



THE ADAM PRINCIPLES

The ADAM principles are the key to succesful composting.

Aliveness

A healthy compost bin is a 'living creature', full of worms, microbes, bacteria and fungi which work together to decompose and breakdown organic materials.

Diversity

Compost needs a variety of ingredients with a ratio of at least 60% carbon materials and 40% nitrogen materials. This will create a balanced, nutrient-rich compost.

Aeration

Organisms living in your compost system need oxygen, so aerate at least once a week. Aeration also deters unwelcome pests and reduces smells. Use a pitchfork or a spiral tool for ease.

Moisture

Compost organisms need water to maintain good moisture levels (like a damp sponge). Add water each week or two, especially during hot weather. If your compost is too wet, add some dry carbon materials to absorb the extra moisture.

WHAT GOES IN A COMPOST?

Carbon/brown materials 60-70%

- Tree prunings — twigs & sticks chopped/mulched
- Dried leaves and bark
- Paper and newspaper, torn/shredded
- Egg shells, crushed
- Cardboard and egg cartons, torn/shredded

Other useful ingredients

- Sawdust, from untreated timber
- Vacuum contents
- Hair, wool and cotton
- Straw and mulch
- Old potting mix
- Garden lime and wood ash

Nitrogen/green materials 30-40%

- Fruit and vegetable scraps, chopped
- Grass and garden clippings
- Weeds without seeds
- Cut flowers
- Coffee grounds and tea leaves/bags

Other useful ingredients

- Animal manure — chicken, cow, sheep, rabbit
- Weed tea
- Seaweed
- Sprinkling of blood and bone
- Algae
- Aquarium water (freshwater)

WHAT YOU NEED

Things you need before you get started



Compost bin (in a sunny spot)



60% carbon materials (plant matter)



40% nitrogen materials (food waste)



A spiral tool or pitch fork to



Water

HOW TO START YOUR COMPOST

- Place the compost bin in a sunny spot - the higher the temperature of the bin, the faster the material will breakdown
- Place a layer of twigs or coarse mulch (15cm) at the base of the bin (this captures oxygen and provides drainage)
- Add a shovel or two of finished compost if you can access some (this gives it a great kick start with all those live organisms)
- Continue to alternate with carbon and nitrogen materials as you have them
- Always cover food scraps with a layer of carbon material or dig into the compost (exposed scraps can attract vermin)
- Aerate the compost each week or two (a spiral tool makes this easy, otherwise use a pitch fork)
- Add water each week or two to maintain a good moisture level

HOW DO I KNOW WHEN MY COMPOST IS READY?

The materials in your compost bin will decompose and shrink as you add them, so it may take time before your compost bin is full. When full, stop adding material and it should be converted to a sweet smelling crumbly dark brown soil-like material within two to three months. The speed at which your compost bin works will depend on heat generated in the bin, how closely the ADAM principles are followed and the size of the material added (the smaller the items the better).



Do your garden a favour and use this garden gold by:

- Digging into garden beds
- Adding to potting mix
- Adding to seed raising mix
- Adding around the drip-line of plants (away from plant stems) and cover with mulch to keep it alive

If you want to separate the earthworms from your compost, expose the surface to light for 30 mins or more to allow the worms to burrow away from the light.



COMPOST TROUBLESHOOTING

"My compost bin smells!"

Your compost may smell because you have not aerated it sufficiently and added too many food scraps. Add dry brown material such as leaves or paper, two to three handfuls of garden lime to reduce acidity and turn the heap to aerate.

"There are rats and cockroaches in my bin!"

Vermin such as rats or mice are attracted to meat, bread and dairy products in the compost so avoid placing these in the compost. Avoid leaving fruit and vegetable scraps exposed on top. Water and aerate the heap regularly (vermin dislike a moist environment and do not like disturbance). You can also lay fine mesh, or chicken wire (with drainage holes) under the bin or heap to ensure vermin cannot enter the heap and ensure your bin is covered to reduce the likelihood of vermin.

"My waste heap is not breaking down into compost!"

It should take eight to twelve weeks to develop complete compost. If your composting is taking a long time to become ready it might mean:

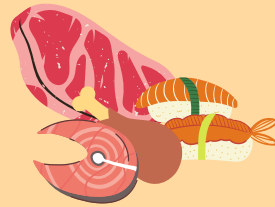
- It needs more nitrogen materials (compost needs about 30-40% nitrogen materials) or add two to three handfuls of blood and bone or chicken manure
- There is not enough oxygen — turn the heap more often
- The compost is too dry — add more water
- The compost is not generating enough heat to break down the materials — ensure it gets as much sunlight as possible
- The materials are too big — the smaller the pieces the faster they will break down



DO NOT ADD TO THE COMPOST!



bread & dairy



meat & seafood



eucalyptus leaves



kitchen oil and fats



diseased leaves



animal faeces

