

Home composting is a great way to make the most of garden and kitchen waste. It's easy, costs little or nothing to get started and can significantly improve the quality of your garden produce!

Getting started

Most councils will provide a black compost bin either free or at a low cost (see contact details at the end). If you're feeling energetic, you can build your own, bearing in mind that it should be at least 1 cubic metre in size to allow heat to build up. It's best to site your bin on bare earth, to allow worms to enter the heap through the bottom, which will help to mix up the materials and form compost more quickly.



Although it's tempting to hide your bin out of the way in a shady corner, it'll produce compost more quickly in a warm spot - so choose a sunny site if possible.

What to put in

If you're starting from scratch, put some woody stems in first, to help air circulate. Then build up your heap in layers, using kitchen waste such as veg peelings, young weeds, small pet bedding, grass cuttings, soft prunings and even newspaper paper and egg boxes (but not glossy magazines), making sure that the materials are spread out to the edges. Make sure the heap is nice and moist (water if it looks dry). Keep it covered—most black bins come with a lid, but you can also use old carpet. The key is to use a good mix of different types of materials and if possible, mix in activators, such as comfrey leaves, nettles and grass, which will help the heap to decompose more quickly. Too much of these can make the pile soggy, however, so mix in well with other dry or brown materials.

What to leave out

Avoid meat/fish or any cooked food - these can attract vermin. Also avoid cat litter, dog faeces or disposable nappies and diseased plants. Sawdust or wood prunings can take a very long time to rot and may slow a small heap



down. Weed roots such as bindweed will thrive, but can be sieved out prior to use.

What about leaves?

Autumn leaves are also slow to rot, but these can be bagged separately and in a few seasons, will decompose to form a lovely leaf mould.

How long does it take?

If you're a dedicated composter, you could have results in a couple of months, but expect it to take 6 months to a year - it depends on what you put in and how hard you're prepared to work. Turning the heap every couple of months will speed up the process, although this can be hard work, so at the very least, give it a stir with a garden fork.

How will I know when it's ready?

Check the bottom of the heap. Although the top may look far from ready, the bottom half will be ready much faster—this is easy to check in a black bin with door at the bottom. It should have turned into a dark brown, crumbly material that looks like soil, although it'll still be perfectly usable if there are a few bits of twigs or eggshell in it.

Add to your flower or vegetable beds as a mulch, or dig in, and start again! If you have room, several bins at different stages will provide a supply of compost at regular intervals.

Find out more:

Scottish residents can get a compost bin from just £8 from Waste Aware Scotland in association with the Waste, Recycling and Action programme—call 0845 076 0223 or visit www.wasteawarescotland.org.uk/html/compost.asp for more details.



To find out more about home composting, get in touch with the Master Composter at Changeworks - Tel: 0131 555 4010

Visit www.organicgardening.org.uk/organicgardening/compost_pf.php



www.recyclenow.com/home_composting/

About the Edinburgh & Lothians Greenspace Trust

The Trust is dedicated to creating and improving access to quality greenspace for communities in Edinburgh, Midlothian and East Lothian. We work with communities, landowners & local authorities on practical environmental projects which will improve quality of life for communities. Our projects include the creation and improvement of woodlands, gardens and parks, working alongside community groups to develop and implement projects.



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