

# FACT SHEET

# Composting



There are many ways to make successful compost but we recommend the 400L dome-shaped bins with well-fitting lids. They keep pests out and moisture in, creating ideal composting conditions! We also prefer the Compost Mate aerator as it makes aerating your compost super easy.



**TIP: To be extra sure, cover the base of your bin with a layer of fine wire mesh that will prevent rats and mice from entering.**

## GETTING STARTED

1. Choose a site in your garden that has good drainage. Bury the bin at least 10cm into the soil to keep out burrowing pests.
2. Add a layer of small twigs, egg cartons, dry leaves and/or shredded newspaper. This acts to aerate the compost.
3. Add activators (things that contain and support composting bacteria) such as animal manures, compost from an old heap, blood and bone and/or organically rich garden soil.
4. Add water.
5. Add materials in thin "brown" and "green" layers. Water as needed to keep it moist.
6. Continue adding alternate layers of green and brown materials until your bin is full.
7. To aerate your compost and to speed up breakdown turn your compost with a compost mate or pitch fork every 1-2 weeks.
8. Monitor your compost and make sure it's breaking down nicely. Ensure it's not too dry, too wet or attracting pests – see over for troubleshooting.

## WHAT TO COMPOST?

Anything that was once alive can be composted; however pet poo should NOT be added in order to avoid disease causing microbes. To get started, the following items are a good guide. In general, add more brown than green materials:

### Green Materials

High Moisture Content / Rich in Nitrogen

Fruit / vegetable scraps  
Food scraps  
Tea leaves / coffee grounds  
Dead cut flowers  
Fresh grass clippings  
Hair

### Brown Materials

Low Moisture Content / Rich in Carbon

Dried garden prunings  
Dried leaves  
Dried grass clippings  
Straw  
Sawdust  
Paper products

## HOT VS COLD COMPOSTING

If you have enough green and brown materials on hand, you can fill your bin up in one go. It should then heat up in the middle to generate “hot compost”, which breaks down fast and kills weed seeds in the process. However, don’t add any worms as they will be killed by the heat.

If you fill your bin gradually as food and garden scraps become available, you will be “cold composting”. This won’t kill weed seeds, so avoid adding these, but it will support composting worms and other beneficial critters that assist with breakdown. Ensure your bin is placed in shade during the summer months.

## TROUBLESHOOTING

PROBLEM	CAUSE	SOLUTION
Smelly compost	Too much water or “green” material, poor drainage, lack of aeration.	Add garden lime and turn (aerate) the heap. Add more brown material to absorb moisture.
Pests*  <i>* If cold composting, you will have lots of activity in your bin don't panic about vinegar flies, slaters, beetles and worms.</i>	Ants = too dry	Add water and green material, ensure all contents are moistened.
	Flies/maggots = inappropriate ingredients	Make sure the lid is secure and avoid meat and dairy items. Cover food scraps & any maggots with a layer of leaves or hay pre-soaked in water – they will soon break down.
	Cockroaches = too acidic, anaerobic	Turn compost to aerate and add garden lime to raise the pH back up to neutral.
	Rats / mice = inappropriate ingredients	Make sure the bin is dug into the ground and add fine wire mesh to the base. Make sure the lid is secure & avoid meat and dairy items. Cover food scraps with a layer of leaves or hay pre-soaked in water.
Just not working – “I will decompose quicker than my compost heap.”	Balance of ingredients is not right, mix is too dry	Make sure you have the right mix of green and brown materials and moisture. Turn your heap and water it to ensure even moisture. Speed up the process and add more green ingredients and activators.

**Tip: Monitor your compost – get to know it, read its moods and give it what it wants. And don’t panic! The finished product will not look homogenous like commercial compost. Each item will compost at a different rate, chunks in your compost are fine – your garden won’t mind!**

**SEE OUR OTHER FACT SHEETS AND GREEN RESOURCES  
VISIT OUR WEBPAGE: [www.denmark.wa.gov.au/our-shire/environment/environmental-events.aspx](http://www.denmark.wa.gov.au/our-shire/environment/environmental-events.aspx)**

