

# Compost factsheet

## Why compost?

Composting is nature's way of turning waste back into nourishment for plants and animals. It happens all around us - in the woods, in fields and parks and it can happen in your garden too.

All organic materials - from vegetable peelings and woollen jumpers to pet hair and paper - can be turned into rich compost. As up to 30% of the waste in the average household bin is organic, most householders find that composting vegetable/fruit peelings, leaves and garden waste makes a considerable difference to how much they send to landfill.

Home produced compost improves your soil, reduces the need for artificial fertilizers and means you don't have to buy any. It is an easy, cheap and practical way to manage your waste and take care of your garden.

## How does it work?

Composting happens when small organisms (several billions in each gram of compost) such as harmless bacteria, enzymes and fungi are given a chance to 'eat' organic waste. This process breaks down the waste and changes its structure so that plants and trees can extract nourishment from it. In addition, the waste produced by the organisms and by worms in the compost heap increases the nutritional value.

There are several ways of making compost, but it's a fairly simple process and will quite happily manage itself. With a bit of help from you, the process is faster and the end product better.

The ingredients of good composting are:

1. Organic materials
2. Air
3. Water

Microbes need air just like any other organism, so it's important to turn and aerate the compost heap regularly. Water is important too, as many bacteria and other organisms in the heap can't do their job if it's too dry. Moisture also helps to regulate the temperature of the heap, ensuring the most efficient breakdown process. You can test the moisture content of your compost by picking up a handful (it is recommended that you wear gloves to do this) and squeezing it. If water comes out of the compost, it is too wet. If the compost falls apart in your hand, it is too dry.

<https://www.edenproject.com/learn/for-everyone/how-to-make-a-compost-heap-10-top-tips>

# Soil Factsheet

## How is soil made?

Soil is made out of large rocks like mountains being bashed together over hundreds of years until they are broken down into tiny particles. On their own, these tiny particles become a type of soil which we know as sand. It drains water easily, and retains heat which is great for warming crops in the spring. This type of soil does not have very many nutrients however. Plants, like humans need food and nutrients to grow well. This is where decomposed organic material like leaves, grasses, wood and food leftovers come in. As organic material decomposes, bacteria, enzymes and worms break down the structure of the material resulting in a fibrous mush called compost. Compost is rich in minerals like carbon, nitrogen and potassium. If left alone over many years, layers and layers of compost are compacted and become something called humus. It is the minerals in the compost and humus that help plants to grow healthily and produce the food you might eat at your next meal. Just think, the food you don't eat, can be prepared as food for the plants you might be growing in your garden.

## What soil is best for growing vegetables?

The best soil for growing vegetables is a combination of sandy soil and nutrient rich compost. Plants and their roots need to be able to breathe so it is important that the soil not be too densely packed. Worms are great little helpers for making holes in the soil so that roots can breathe and absorb nutrients. Just like children, different plants like different nutrients and as they grow they will take out specific minerals from the soil while leaving others behind. In order to keep too many nutrients from being sucked out of the soil, gardeners can plant different crops every year.