

How to Make Organic Compost

This free How To tip sheet was produced by the Cheapskates Club – www.cheapkates.com.au

Compost is the type of soil plants really love to grow in, because it's made from lots of great organic material. It's also the safest kind of material to grow your plants in.

Step 1: You'll need to start with a base of material that is rich in carbon. You'll need things like straw, dead flowers, shredded newspaper and dried leaves. Some people forget to add these brown materials, but they're essential.

Step 2: Next, you need green materials that are high in nitrogen. These materials include things like kitchen waste from plants, animal manure, green garden clippings and grass clippings. You can use all kinds of fruit and vegetable peelings and leftovers, but **no meat** (it attracts rats and mice and other vermin)!

Step 3: Then you'll need a little bit of soil from your garden. It's important for you to remember that you should actually add a bit of natural soil to your compost to get it started. You'll start by putting down a layer of your brown material. This could be straw, dry leaves, or even shredded newspapers if you don't have anything else. On top of that, you'll add some of your green stuff, then a layer of soil. Then you'll add more of your brown material to the top. Finally, you need to add water to these layers. Just moisten them, don't drown them!

Step 4: Repeat steps 1 – 3. You'll continue in this manner to add layers until you have a compost pile that is around a metre wide and a metre high. You should have a ratio of about three parts brown material to one part of green material. If your pile isn't a metre tall yet, just keep adding material to it whenever you have it available. A compost pile around a cubic metre in size will get hot enough to kill weeds and seeds.

Step 5: Once every two weeks you should turn your compost pile. This means using something like a garden fork (a pitchfork) to stir your pile. You'll want to work all of the stuff in the middle out toward the edges, and move the outer material in toward the middle.

Step 6: Be sure to keep your compost pile moist. It should never be soggy, but be sure not to let it dry out. If your compost pile gets too dry, it will stop decomposing properly. If you see steam coming up from your pile when you turn it, you can be pretty sure everything is decomposing properly (compost piles can get quite warm).

You can also build or buy a bin to house your compost pile. This can help keep your pile neat and tidy, so it doesn't spread out too much. You can also buy or make rotating compost bins that you can turn in order to mix your compost. These aren't necessary, but they can make your job easier.

Once your compost turns black and starts to smell sweet, it's ready to be mixed with your regular garden soil. In fact, you can use this rich compost as potting soil, usually with nothing else added. You can even replace most of the soil in your garden with this material, or use it in raised beds.

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