

# Tips on how to compost at home



## Why compost?

Composting is a great way to make use of your garden waste – everything from lawn clippings to annual weeds, hedge-trimmings to faded flowers. You can also add plant-based kitchen waste, such as veg peelings, along with paper and cardboard.



Composting can also save you money as it means you do not need to buy as many garden products like soil improvements, fertilisers, and mulches. As well as reducing waste and saving money, composting is also great for the environment as it encourages garden biodiversity, in the form of worms, slugs and woodlice. This then provides food for valuable wildlife like birds and hedgehogs.

## Did you know?

**Composting at home for just one year can save global warming gases equivalent to all the CO<sub>2</sub> your kettle produces annually, or your washing machine produces in three months.**



# Composting: a step-by-step guide

## Find the right site:

To create the best possible compost, you will need to find the best place to keep your compost bin. Ideally, your bin should be in a sunny spot directly on the soil so worms and other organisms can speed up the composting process. If you need to keep your compost bin on a patio or concrete, place some paper and twigs on the bottom to encourage the colonisation of these organisms.



## Add the right ingredients:

Keep a caddy or old container in the kitchen to store items for composting inside the house. For a full list of compostable items see page 6.

## Fill it:

Add your stored items into the compost bin. You should try and get a good mix of 'greens and browns' to produce the best possible compost. See page 6 for more information on greens and browns.

## Turn it:

The heap should be turned to ensure adequate circulation of air. Air is very important in the composting process as aerobic organisms such as bacteria and worms will not be able to function if the heap is not aerated.



## Wait:

Once you have added items to your compost bin you will need to wait between nine months and a year before your compost is ready to use. During this time, you just need to keep adding 'greens and browns' to your compost and let nature do its thing. See page 6 for more information on greens and browns.



## Is it ready to use?

Once your compost has turned into a dark, crumbly soil-like material you know it's ready to use.



## Removing the compost:

To remove the compost, lift the bin slightly or open the small hatch at the bottom and scoop out the compost. If you do not need to use all of your compost, you can bag it up for future use. Finished compost can be stored for up to a year.

## Use it:

You can now use your compost! Compost can be used as mulch, for soil enrichment, or it works great in planters and flower beds.



# Make composting at home easier

Here are some optional accessories that may help make your home composting easier.

## **Aerator:**

An aerator can help you mix up the contents of your compost. There is no need to empty or remove the contents of your bin. Simply push into compost and lift and mix.



## **Sieve:**

A sieve helps remove some of the larger pieces of material from your finished compost. This is particularly useful to help achieve a fine compost medium to use as a potting mixture or as a lawn dressing.



## **Kitchen Caddy:**

Various designs of kitchen caddies are available to help you collect your organic kitchen waste before taking it to your compost bin.



## **Liners:**

Kitchen caddy liners that are 100% compostable and made from corn or potato starch are an ideal way to line your caddy to help keep it clean. Although they are not essential for use in the solid side caddies, they do need to be used with the ventilated caddies. Once full, the caddy liner and contents can be put straight into the compost bin. You could also line your caddy with old newspaper instead of liners.



## What can you compost?

The key to a good compost is getting the ratio between 'greens and browns' right. It is recommended that you aim for a 50/50 split between the two.

### GREENS

- Tea bags
- Grass cutting
- Vegetable peelings
- Flowers and nettles
- Coffee grounds and coffee filters
- Weeds

### BROWNS

- Crushed eggshells
- Egg and cereal boxes
- Scrunched up paper and cardboard
- Toilet and kitchen roll tubes
- Twigs and hedge clippings
- Straw and hay
- Guinea pig and rabbit bedding
- Ashes from wood and paper
- Sawdust
- Wool
- Tissues, paper towels and napkins

## What can't you compost?

- Cooked vegetables
- Meat
- Dairy products
- Diseased plants
- Dog and cat faeces
- Plastics
- Glass
- Metals



# Recycling Autumn Leaves

When autumn arrives, you may have a surplus of fallen leaves that could upset the balance of ingredients in your compost bin.

However, by turning them into leafmold, a dark brown, crumbly, and nutrient-rich material, you can make a great soil improver, lawn conditioner, and mulch for your garden.

Large quantities of dead leaves are best recycled separately because they are broken down by the slow action of fungi rather than bacteria. All kinds of deciduous leaves can be used for leafmold, although some may take longer to break down than others.

## Making the Perfect Leafmold

### Step 1: Collect the leaves

Small quantities of leaves are best gathered by hand using a rake; however, if you have a large quantity of leaves, they can be collected with a special leaf blower vacuum, which shreds the material into smaller pieces, helping to speed up the decaying process.

### Step 2: Add moisture

If the leaves are dry, moisten them with a little water.

### Step 3: Bag it up

Bag up the leaves in a large bin bag and punch holes in it to allow the air to circulate. Place in a secluded area of the garden.

### Step 4: Use chicken wire

Alternatively, you can make a simple pile container made from plastic or wire netting with a few supporting stakes which can be reused year after year. Adjust the size to suit your requirements.



## Step 5: A little patience

Leave the bag or container untouched for between one and two years. The longer you leave it, the finer the leafmold will be.

## Step 6: Mulch

Young leafmold, which is one to two years old, can be used as mulch around shrubs, herbaceous borders, trees, and vegetables—just add it as a layer on top of existing soil.

## Step 7: Soil improver

You can also dig young leafmold into beds as a soil improver for sowing and planting.

## Step 8: Sowing mix

Well-rotted leafmold that is two years old or more can be used to make a seed sowing mix. Combine equal parts of leafmold, sharp sand, and garden compost for an ideal growing medium.

## Step 9: Potting

For established plants, mix well-rotted leafmold that is over two years old with equal parts of sharp sand, garden soil, and compost to make a perfect potting compost.



# Frequently Asked Questions

## 1. What do I do if my compost is too wet?

If too much wet material is added or the unit is exposed to rainfall, this will restrict the amount of air in the heap/composter, thereby slowing down the composting process.

To prevent your compost becoming too wet, you can:

- Reduce the amount of wet material added.
- Protect the compost from rainfall by keeping a lid on the composter, securing it with an old patio slab.
- For outdoor heaps, cover with a tarp.

## 2. What do I do if my compost is too dry?

A lack of moisture will result in the composting process slowing down.

To prevent your compost becoming too dry, you can:

- Add water to the compost.
- Use a garden fork to loosen the contents or stir with a stick or compost turner (available at most garden centres).

## 3. Should I buy an accelerator?

This should not be necessary. To encourage the composting process, simply add a few shovelfuls of old compost or garden soil.

## 4. Should I chop up material?

Yes. Larger items can take longer to break down and smaller particles decompose quicker.

Example: A complete cabbage stalk may take up to 2 years to decompose, but when chopped into smaller pieces, it will decompose in a matter of months.

## **5. Can I add diseased plants?**

NO! The temperature of the composter may not be sufficient to render them harmless and may damage the composting process (kill pathogens).

## **7. Can I add weeds?**

Avoid adding roots of perennial weeds such as docks, dandelions, bindweed, and ground elder. If added, these weeds are likely to continue growing. You should also exclude weeds with seeds, as they may spread throughout your garden when you use the finished compost.

## **8. The compost unit appears to attract vermin**

To avoid attracting vermin, you should:

- Avoid including materials such as meat and other items not on the 'green' and 'brown' list.
- Ensure the bottom lip of the composter is buried under the soil's surface.
- Aerate the heap regularly with a fork.
- Make noise and visit the compost bin regularly (a good clap can help).

## **9. The compost unit appears to attract flies**

You can avoid attracting flies by turning the compost regularly and adding a layer of brown materials such as cardboard or old fabric like a woolly jumper, t-shirt, or towel.

Note: The only flies you might encounter are fruit flies. The eggs are often present in the skin of fruit and vegetables and are harmless to humans.

For more information, please visit our website:  
[westsussex.gov.uk/reduceyourwaste](https://www.westsussex.gov.uk/reduceyourwaste)





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