

Composting

Did you know that more than 50% of what goes in the average Brisbane general waste bin is organic material that comes from our kitchens and gardens?

When we put organic waste, such as food scraps and garden clippings into landfill, they cause greenhouse gas emissions and odour problems. The same materials can be reused and recycled into compost to make your garden healthier.

Benefits of compost

Using compost on your garden means:

- spending less time weeding and watering your garden
- needing to use less artificial fertiliser in your garden
- healthier soil, so you'll grow healthier plants
- save time and money
- keeping organic waste out of landfill
- reducing greenhouse gas emissions

What is compost?

Compost is the soil-like material that comes from the controlled break down of plant and vegetable matter. You can use compost as potting mix, fertiliser or mulch.

Compost ingredients

A good compost mix is made up of the following ingredients: nitrogen, air, water, carbon.

Nitrogen-rich materials include:

- fruit and vegetable scraps
- fresh green lawn clippings and leaves
- tea leaves/bags and coffee grounds
- egg shells.

Carbon-rich materials include:

- dried leaves and dead grass clippings
- small sticks and twigs
- woody twig clippings
- paper towels and cardboard
- vacuum cleaner dust.

Avoid these ingredients:

- manure from carnivores (for example, cat and dog manure)
- weeds that you are eliminating from your garden
- vegetable fats and oils
- dairy products
- meat scraps



Method

Choose a well-drained, sunny position for your compost and make a decision whether to have a compost heap, enclosure or commercial compost bin. If you have large quantity of garden waste a heap is an easy option, while a bin is a great option for a smaller suburban garden.

Then fill the bottom with coarse material, such as sticks or twigs, to aerate and nitrogen-rich ingredients such as lawn clippings, garden trimmings and weeds, make the next layer one of the following carbon ingredients:

- leaves
- shredded or chopped prunings
- torn paper or cardboard
- dry grass
- soil or mature compost
- fresh herbs, such as comfrey.

Then add water and keep the compost moist, but not soaked.

Add air by regularly turning the top layers of compost with a garden fork. If you add extra broken twigs and sticks occasionally, it will also help air move through the composting heap.

Add a spade full of rich soil to add micro-organisms.

When your bin or heap is full, give it a final turn and then let it mature for 12 to 14 weeks.

Common problems

Common problems including having smelly compost, slow decay, maggots or cockroach eggs or attracting mice and rats. Refer to the table below to understand more about the cause of these problems and the solutions.

Problem	Cause	Solution
Smelly compost	Heap is too wet	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Add dry leaves
Smelly compost	Not enough air	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Turn more often to improve drainage and aeration• Add 250g of garden lime• Cover the heap during rain
Slow decay	Not enough nutrients	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Add a small amount of nitrogen-based material (e.g. blood and bone)
Slow decay	Not enough heat	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Turn the heap more often
Slow decay	Not enough air	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Moisten more regularly
Slow decay	Not enough water	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Moisten more regularly
Slow decay	Too cold in winter	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cover the heap with insulation material (such as hessian or carpet)
Maggots/cockroach eggs	Meat, seafood, fats or faeces in the heap	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Remove the cause• Cover the maggots with lime• Add soil to the top of the heap, keep covered and turn regularly to 'cook' fly and cockroach eggs
Mice and rats	Excess bread in the heap	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Put fine wire mesh underneath the bin/heap• Turn the heap regularly
Mice and rats	Heap is too dry	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Moisten more regularly with a light sprinkle from the garden hose

1 Common compost problems and solutions

Using compost in your garden

Your compost is ready when there are no recognisable bits of original material, when it has a fine crumbly texture, when it is almost black in colour and has a good earthy smell. Make sure you wear gloves when working with the compost and wash your hands afterwards.

For more information search 'Compost and Worm Farms' on the Council's website at brisbane.qld.gov.au to download the compost and worm farm brochure.