

# Essential Guide: Home Composting

An easy guide to composting at home





# Getting started with home composting

Simple steps to reducing waste and your carbon footprint

**Before you go** and throw everything into your compost bin outside and make a big sludgy mess, we've already made that mistake for you.

Composting at home needs a mixture of materials to make it work.

After extensive reading and practise of how to compost properly, we've put this guide together so you can successfully compost at home, meaning less waste going into landfill and you'll be rewarded with a free fertiliser for your garden and plant pots to keep them looking beautiful.

## Different types of compost bins

The first thing getting started with home composting is to choose which bin suits you and your garden.

Compost bins come in a variety of shapes and sizes; common types of composters are:

- **Circular plastic compost bins** – these popular bins are great for smaller gardens and are a great cheap option. The non-porous sides mean they are effective at retaining

---

“Top tip – use a kitchen caddy to transfer kitchen waste to your compost bin mess-free.”

---





“Composting needs a mixture of materials to make it work, otherwise it’s just a big sludgy mess!”



heat and the circular sides mean it is easy to turn the materials. Most will have a slot in the bottom to collect your compost.

- **Square plastic compost bins** – these self-assembly bins are another good option for smaller gardens. You need to make sure you turn well to make sure no materials get stuck in the corners, again most will have a slot in the bottom to collect your compost.
- **Wooden compost bins** – these are typically made of slats normally sold as a flatpack, they don’t usually come with lids, but you could easily use a tarpaulin cover to keep the rain out. They are more expensive than plastic bins but will last a long time so are more of an investment bin.

The downside to this type of bin is it could potentially attract vermin.

- **Tumbler compost bin** – this is a completely enclosed bin with a handle that you can easily turn to mix your materials. This type of bin doesn’t contain worms that churn through the material so the compost will have a loose rough character. An advantage of a tumbler is you won’t get a vermin problem as it is off the ground and enclosed.
- **Beehive composter** – this attractive wooden composter is durable but relies on layering your compost as you cannot turn these. They have a handy slot in the bottom to collect your compost.
- **Worm composter** – worms do an excellent job in churning through organic material, these attractive kits can be kept in your kitchen

or in a shed. Better suited for smaller amounts of material, they consist of at least two compartments: a lower collection sump for the liquid and an upper composting area where the kitchen waste goes in, and the worms actively work.

- **Open compost bin** – these can be made from just about anything you like such as old wooden pallets, chicken wire, or cinder blocks. These are good for larger gardens, because of their large open size they are easy to turn but could attract vermin.

## How to make compost at home

Once you’ve chosen your compost bin you need to find the perfect location, a spot with a nice amount of sun and shade that’s easily accessible.

Top tip – use a kitchen caddy to transfer your kitchen waste to your compost bin mess-free.

1

**First thing first,** choose a compost bin that's right for your garden.

2

**The best place** for your compost bin is somewhere easily accessible with a nice amount of sun and shade.

3

**Good compost** is a balanced mixture of materials that are high in nitrogen and carbon.

You can buy these caddy liners that will also compost in your compost bin

### Base

You'll then need to prepare the base (not necessary for tumbler or worm composter bins), fork the soil well to help the worms and creepy crawlies find it, then add a layer of twigs and paper to help aerate the pile.

### Balance

To make good compost you need a balanced mixture of materials that are high in nitrogen and carbon.

These come from green materials (such as cabbage leaves and grass cuttings) which is high in nitrogen and dry brown material (such as twigs and cardboard) that is rich in carbon.

Too much nitrogen, especially too much grass cuttings will result in a smelly sludge (this was our mistake).

Chop or break up any large chunks of material before putting it in your compost bin.

### What can you compost?

**Green materials** – contains nitrogen and break down quickly

- Grass cuttings
- Weeds
- Fruit and vegetable peelings

- Teabags (make sure they don't contain plastic)
- Coffee grounds
- Flowers
- Leaves
- Plants

**Brown materials** – contains carbon, break down slowly but add structure

- Paper
- Cardboard
- Bamboo toothbrushes (bristles removed)
- Egg boxes
- Eggshells
- Pet and human hair
- Toilet roll tubes
- Straw and hay
- Wood chips
- Dry leaves
- Corks
- Feathers
- Compostable packaging

**Top tip** – if your compost looks too wet, add more brown materials, if it looks too dry add a bit of water and turn your pile around once a week.

### What can't you compost?

- Cooked or uncooked rice or grains (these will attract vermin)
- Meat, fish, or dairy products

**“Don't worry if your compost is a little lumpy, it's not meant to look like the shop-bought stuff!”**

- Cooking oil
- Bones
- Weeds, as these will most likely grow instead of decomposing
- Nappies
- Human and animal faeces
- Cat litter
- Glossy or coated paper as this contains plastic
- Synthetic materials

## What can I do about the smell?

A successful compost heap should smell rich and earthy, compost that has too little aeration will smell putrid or like rotting eggs.

Turn the compost pile to help get air into the compost and stop the bad smell.

You may also want to add some air pockets by using materials like dry leaves, cardboard or eggshells to help keep the pile from over-compacting again.



material resembling thick moist soil that gives off an earthy fresh aroma.

Don't worry if your compost is a little lumpy with twigs and eggshells, it is normal for it not to look like shop-bought compost.

Your homemade compost is a nutrient-rich food that your garden will thank you for.

**Top tip** – if you are adding new scraps regularly, it's a good idea to bury them under the pile that's already starting to break down instead of just throwing it on top.

## Will councils accept food waste in my brown bin?

This topic is a bit of a minefield and ever changing, so our best advice is to check your local council website to see if they collect food waste in your brown bin.

## How long will it take?

Composting is a waiting game; it can take between 4 and 12 months depending on the type of composter you have.

You will know when it is ready as it will turn into a dark, crumbly

1

**First**, you need green materials, like weeds and coffee grounds.

2

**Second**, you need brown materials like corks from your wine bottles.

3

**Bones, meat, fish, and cat litter** are a no-go for your compost bin!

**Need a little more advice before you start thinking about striking a deal with Chelsea Flower Show?**

Message your Carbon Mentor for a blooming good chat.

