

Composting

Composting options

Broadly speaking there are four composting options for use at home.

- Bokashi bucket
- Worm farm (covered in another workshop)
- Composting in bins
- Composting in bays

System	Amount of waste	Space needs	Cost	Time/effort	Comments
Boakshi	Low to medium	Low and not at all messy.	Moderate	Minimal and simple	Works best with more than one bucket; on-going cost of enzyme mix.
Worm farm	Low	Low but can be a bit messy. Also, worms like to be kept cool.	Low after initial investment.	Minimal time, need a bit of care and attention.	Worms aren't that hungry and they don't like it too hot!
Compost in a bin	Medium	Medium and can be messy.	Low after initial investment in bins, but do benefit from added materials like manure and straw.	To really work you need to keep adding layers and make sure they're moist.	Works best with more than one bin. Need to sit on earth.
Compost in a bay	High	High and very messy	Low, but benefit from added materials as above.	A big commitment in terms of gathering materials and building it. Then needs to be kept moist and turned once or twice.	Work best with three or four bays with different ages of compost in each bay. Also work best when a compost heap is built using a large amount of material in one go.

How to...

Boakashi Bucket

Bokashi Buckets and enzyme can be purchased from www.bokashi.com.au.

The system works by adding an enzyme to food waste. The enzyme is dried onto a carrier substance such as milled wheat or rice for ease of application. The enzyme helps break food waste down quickly. A Bokashi Bucket produces both solid and liquid composts.



Pretty much any food waste (including meat and citrus) can be added to a Boakashi Bucket.

They are very simple to use. Simply put food waste in the bucket, occasionally cover with a layer of the enzyme. Continue until the bucket is full. Seal and leave until well composted. Then add the soil to the garden. Bokashi Buckets also produce a liquid manure that can be diluted 1 to 10 with water and used to feed the garden.

Composting

The best way to compost is to gather a lot of raw materials and then build the heap in one go. This method is usually used with large open composting bays. It results in so called "hot" composting – the heap will build up heat as it decomposes. This is good as it will kill off unwanted weed seeds.

If this isn't feasible, then you can build the heap up in layers over time. This is usually done in the black plastic composting bins. This method usually results in a "cold" composting process. This takes a bit longer to compost completely and can have weed seeds in it.

Both methods work fine so long as the right mix of ingredients is used.

Roughly speaking you need around 1 part green to 3 or so parts brown and a sprinkle of manure.

"Green" material includes...

- Food scraps (vege and fruit are best; be cautious with meat and bread as they are more likely to attract rodents)
- Tea and coffee grounds
- Grass clippings
- Soft, leafy pruning's
- Weeds (but not ones with bulbs or seeds)

"Brown" material includes...

- Dry leaves and twigs
- Wood chip (larger branches are best chipped before use)
- Straw/pea straw (best soaked in water before use if very dry)
- Shredded paper (avoid glossy paper)
- Animal hair

Any manure can be used.

The more finely chopped the green and brown materials are, then the finer the compost produced will be. For small scale composting (i.e. in a compost bin) it makes sense to chop things up small, but this isn't always so easy on large scale.

For a **large heap done in one go**, build the compost as follows:

1. Keep the heap wet as you build it. It's often worth having the hose spraying over the heap as it is built.
2. Start with a layer of "brown" at the bottom, 10 to 20 cm deep, ideally at least 1m x 1m cross-section.
3. Add a layer of "green", 10 to 20 cm deep.
4. Add a generous sprinkle of manure.
5. Repeat until you run out of materials or the heap is about 1.5m high.
6. Cover with something to keep the heat in, e.g. a generous layer of pea straw, straw or some old carpet.
7. After a few days the heap should get hot.
8. After 3 to 4 weeks turn the compost heap over, watering as you do so, if it's dried out.
9. Cover and leave for another few weeks. It will probably get hot again.
10. The compost should now be ready to use or may need turning again.

This sort of composting can be done either in "composting bays" or directly on the garden bed where the compost will be used.

Using a composting bin

If you're composting a bit at a time in a compost bin then follow the same method as above, but use 10 cm deep layers. The compost probably won't get as hot. If you have lots of food scraps be sure to add a similar volume of "brown" material in layers.

Once the compost bin is full, make sure the lid is well fitted and leave it for a month or two. In hot weather water the compost bin every few days to keep the mix moist.

Start a new heap in a second bin.