



## Compost-making in a heap or bin

Making and using compost reduces waste, saves resources, and regenerates the soil. You can use the finished compost for topping up garden beds, improving soil structure, and as a potting mix.

1. Make a 10-15cm layer of dry material (straw, leaves, chopped mulch, etc).
2. Using a watering can with a rose fitted, moisten the material, but *don't saturate it*.
3. Add a 5-10cm layer of green material (kitchen scraps, lawn clippings, weeds, etc). No need to moisten this layer - this sort of material is already quite moist.
4. Sprinkle on a layer of organic fertiliser e.g. pelleted chicken manure or well-rotted animal manure (chicken, cow, sheep, horse, etc) and lightly moisten.
5. Mix & turn all the material together with a garden fork or a compost spiral.
6. Add a handful of finished compost as a starter culture. Although micro-organisms will naturally come into a new heap of composting material, you can speed the process up by introducing them from a previous heap.
7. Repeat steps 1-4 until you've made a 1 m<sup>3</sup> heap or have filled your compost bin. Keep the heap covered with a thick layer of straw mulch or a tarpaulin or carpet. This will retain moisture, insulate the heap, keep flies away and protect the microbes from UV light.
8. Twice a week give the composting materials a mix & turn to provide oxygen for the microbes, and to stop it from smelling. For the first 2-3 weeks the heap will heat up (up to 60°C) and give off steam. Then after about 6-8 weeks the composting material will have cooled and become a dark earthy soil. The whole heap will reduce to about a third of its initial size. Now you can use it!

### Recommended reading

*The Australian Compost and Worm Book* Peter W. Rutherford & Mary Lou Lamonda  
*Resurrection in a bucket* Margaret Simons

### What is compost?

When microbes break down organic materials we get compost. It's a terrific natural soil-improver.

### What can we use to make compost?

The rule of thumb is 'Anything that once lived can turn into compost'.

Aim for a balance of 'rich' and 'poor', or 'green' and 'brown', material.

Use an activator (e.g. manure). It feeds the micro-organisms which do all the work of decomposing.

A handful of finished compost added to a new pile makes a good starter.

### The ADAM principle devised by Peter Rutherford

'Adam always makes great compost!'

**Aliveness:** like soil, compost is a living thing. Bacteria, fungi, worms, slaters, etc, are all useful workers in a healthy live compost heap.

**Diversity:** a compost heap is only as good as what goes into it.

Use a range of organic materials to give the compost nutrients, structure, and its wonderful capacity to hold moisture.

**Aeration:** letting air (oxygen) into the heap stops it from smelling bad and helps keep the micro-organisms alive.

An aerobic compost pile (with air) will break down faster than an anaerobic one (without air).

**Moisture:** like all other living things, compost needs moisture.

Moisture helps break down organic material and keeps the soil organisms alive too.