

Home Composting

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There are many ways to make compost. One way is the Cool Composting method where the bins never heat up noticeably because only a small amount of material is added in one go. The process might take between 6 to 12 months to produce mature compost. It's unlikely though that weed seeds will be killed but you'll make excellent compost even though there might be a few egg shells and twigs in it. I use this method for a few of my 'dalek-shaped' bins.

I prefer the Hot Composting method where a large batch of material is added in one go. I add at least 170 litres of material each week so the compost heats up fairly quickly. This heat is the energy released by the composting microbes.

According to the literature compost can be made in as little as 12 weeks. Mine takes longer but certainly less than six months.

I never stir my compost as I consider life is too short to bother. I do however turn it from one bin to the next, but only once.

Effective composting requires plenty of air so materials that provide structure, such as corrugated cardboard, egg boxes, the cardboard centres of loo rolls, scrunched up paper and twigs are added. Layering twigs at the bottom of the heap can also help to achieve a vertical flow of air.

My main heaps are made out of pallets and are always covered in old carpet to keep the heat in. I also have plastic 'dalek-shaped' bins but I'm not as successful with these as they always take longer to provide compost.

I put a mix of 'Green' and 'Brown' materials in the heap. The 'Browns' are dry fibrous materials like paper, cardboard, dry leaves, woody prunings etc. These provide energy for the composting organisms. The 'Greens' are soft sappy materials such as kitchen waste, weeds, grass and plant clippings etc. These provide nutrients for composting organisms.

Never put dairy, meat, fish or cooked food in the bin otherwise you'll definitely encourage rodents. Adding shredded paper, hair, sheep's wool, hay, straw (dropped on the road by a local farmer), dead cut flowers, horse manure with straw, egg shells, sawdust, floor

sweepings, contents of the vacuum cleaner bag unless the carpets are man-made, wood ash etc. bulks out the heap. Urine can be added to speed up the process of composting rather than buying products that do this.

If compost becomes slimy it is likely that there's too high a proportion of 'Greens' in the bin. This can be remedied by adding more 'Brown' materials like leaves or sawdust. If the compost is too dry just add more 'Greens' or water.

To understand composting you don't need to get too technical, for instance knowing about Carbon to Nitrogen ratios; as compost is the result of the natural breakdown of organic matter that occurs in all ecosystems. This breakdown will happen eventually, whatever you do. If you are a fan of YouTube the two gardeners to watch are Huw Richards and Charles Dowding. They have useful information about composting, making leaf-mold, wormeries and of course growing edibles.



An unexpected find in the compost heap were these grass snake eggs. No doubt laid by the snake because the heap was warm. Now I know where my frogs and toads have gone!

Happy Composting