

Worksheet 8: The wonderful world of Compost

Composting is a process that turns organic waste into rich compost that your garden will love. When a mix of organic waste is composted, a simple process happens. First, tiny micro-organisms like bacteria break down the softer elements of the waste. Once this has been consumed, larger organisms like worms and beetles move in, and work in the tougher parts. By the end of the process the original ingredients have been broken down, mixed and resemble soil.

What can you compost?

Basically, anything that once lived may be composted.

Greens: Garden clippings, leaves, weeds, grass cuttings, fruit and vegetable waste, bread, pasta, rice, tea bags, and coffee.

Browns: Kitchen paper, sawdust, wood shavings, straw, paper, wood, crushed eggshells, feathers.

Don't compost: Meat, fish, bones, grease, butter, oil, glossy paper, weed seeds, nappies, dog and cat litter (most of these will attract pests.)

Compost heap or Compost bin?

A compost heap is useful for gardeners having large quantities of waste to decompose. Minimum dimensions should be one metre squared and one metre high, enclosed in bricks or timber.

A compost bin is better for smaller gardens. Bins may be purchased or simply constructed from a large drum with open ends.

Remember to put it directly on the ground so earthworms can get in. You may also consider constructing two bins or heaps so material can be accumulated in one while matter is composting in the other.

Getting started...

Place your bin close to the kitchen door for ease of access. Put it on bare soil or grass (not paving or concrete), so that organisms can get access and excess water can drain away.

If you can, break up the ground by digging over it lightly.

The bin needs to be in partial shade and shouldn't be too exposed to the rain.

Put in a layer of garden waste like leaves or weeds, a little loose soil, some broken pieces of cardboard and some vegetable peels. Finally, simply let nature take over.