

# HOME COMPOSTING

## What is composting?

Composting is a natural process where organic materials rot or biodegrade naturally into brown/black crumbly material that can be used in your garden as a soil improver or natural fertiliser. It is an easy way to recycle your garden and kitchen rubbish.

## What do I need?

There are various methods of home composting – make your own compost heap or buy your own compost unit. Compost bins are available from Fermanagh & Omagh District Council. It comes complete with a small container (kitchen caddy) to collect your organic kitchen waste.



## Making our own compost heap?

To erect your own bin, hammer into the ground four 10cm x 10cm (4in x 4in) posts to enclose an area about 1sq m (40sq in.) Then bash the soil with the back of a spade to consolidate it. Next either tack wire netting to the posts, or nail planks around them, leaving the front side easily detachable so you can get the finished compost out.



## Where should I place my compost bin?

Compost bins should be located where they are easy to use both to put waste in and to get compost out. Ideally, place your compost bin on soil, in a partially sunny location sheltered from strong winds.



## How do I compost?

Feed the compost bin with garden and kitchen waste – create a good mix of 'green waste' and 'brown waste' for the best results.

Usually 1/3 nitrogen (green) material and 2/3 carbon (brown) material gives the best results. Green materials are usually moist and include green leaves, grass cuttings,

vegetable and fruit peelings, tea bags and flowers. Green materials act as a natural activator and help speed up the composting process. Brown materials are usually dry and include eggshells, sawdust and wood shavings, cardboard, dry leaves, straw and hair. Brown materials are slow to rot and rich in carbon. Turn the material over every so often to add more air if possible. When your compost is well rotted it will look dark brown / black and when dry will be crumbly. This usually takes approximately 1–2 years (although it may not take longer or shorter depending on the mix of materials going in the compost bin).

## Food Burial and Trenching

Burying vegetative food scraps is an ancient practice and has been in use in Ireland for many years. The traditional methods used are food burial (where food is buried in holes) and trenching (where food is buried in trenches). Once you have your hole or trench dug, a batch of food is then added. The key is to chop up your food wastes into small pieces and then mix them with the soil at the bottom before covering over with the remaining soil. This is then allowed to break down in the ground and, because it is buried, will not attract any pests or animals.

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## What you can compost

### GREEN MATERIALS

- Fruit & vegetables
- Tea leaves/tea bags
- Garden waste
- Leaves
- Some weeds
- Dead plants & flowers
- Grass & hedge cuttings

### BROWN MATERIALS

- Kitchen paper
- Straw
- Wood, twigs & branches (in small pieces)
- Crushed egg shells
- Cardboard egg boxes

## What not to compost and why

✗ Raw and cooked meat, bones	May attract pests
✗ Poultry and fish	May attract pests
✗ Dairy produce	May attract pests
✗ Greasy oily food (e.g. butter/mayonnaise)	May attract pests
✗ Dog and cat litter	Contains pathogens (disease carrying organisms)
✗ Plastics, glass, cans, etc	Will not decompose/biodegrade
✗ Glossy papers/magazines	The glossy coating will not decompose
✗ Weed seeds	Some may thrive in heated conditions
✗ Diseased plants	Danger of spreading diseases to other plants
✗ Disposable nappies	Contains pathogens

### What can I do with compost?

To harvest your finished compost, simply open the lid at the base of the compost bin and shovel it out. It can be used in your garden for the following:

**MULCH** Suppress weed growth, improve soil and hold moisture during the summer months

**TOP DRESSING** for lawns, it's a good fertiliser.

**POTTING MIXES** Only use well-rotted compost. One part sieved compost, one part sand and one part sieved soil.

**SOIL IMPROVER** Enrich the soil, vegetable and flower beds. Dig it into the soil in the autumn after the removal of summer crops or in beds at any time when needed.

**CONTAINER PLANTS** Remove an inch of existing soil and replace with sieved compost

### Composting Agony Aunt

Problem	Probable Cause	Solution
The compost is smelly	Lack of air – too wet, too compact, too many greens	Stir, empty bin, add extra layers of brown
The compost is slow to break down	Too many browns, pieces too large	Shred materials and add greens and water
The compost bin/heap is attracting rats and mice	Cooked food	Cooked food can be recycled in your brown caddy/bin collection
The compost bin/heap is attracting flies	They are probably eating the top layer of fruit & veg	Cover the top layer in the bin/heap with a layer for soil/grass cuttings or newspaper



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