

COMPOSTING

Did you know the average red lidded waste bin within the Canada Bay Local Government Area contains more than half food waste? This food waste, instead of being sent to landfill, can be composted into nutrient rich soil-like material for your garden.

What is compost?

Compost is a rich, soil like material made from the breakdown of organic matter by bacteria and other organisms such as worms, mould and fungi. Every compost is a living system with a life cycle of its own. By composting you can reduce your household and garden waste and make free fertiliser for your garden that retains moisture and improves nutrients in your soil.

Composting principles

Aliveness - compost should be full of living organisms, worms and activity.

Diversity - mix in a wide variety of ingredients such as food scraps, leaves and twigs.

Aeration - aerate your compost to encourage fast odour-free breakdown.

Moisture - all living things, including compost, need water to survive.

You can compost

- ✓ fruit and vegetable scraps
- ✓ vacuum cleaner contents
- ✓ grass clippings
- ✓ tea leaves
- ✓ coffee grounds
- ✓ egg shells
- ✓ cotton rags
- ✓ hair and fur
- ✓ chicken manure
- ✓ soil and old potting mix
- ✓ newspaper and unbleached cardboard
- ✓ woody twigs, sticks, weeds and prunings
- ✓ Anything else once part of a plant

Avoid composting

- ✗ dairy products
- ✗ meat and seafood
- ✗ dog, cat or human faeces

How to compost

Step 1: Compost can be made in a compost bin, tumbling barrel, a three-sided timber bay or you can simply make a 'heap' on a square metre of soil. Whatever system you choose, make sure it is easily accessible and in a well-drained, preferably sunny location.

Step 2: Start with a thick layer (15 cm) of twigs or coarse mulch at the base for drainage.

- Step 3:** Then build a thin layer of kitchen scraps followed by a thin layer of green garden vegetation. Sprinkling soil or finished compost on top of the food waste will help reduce odours and encourage living organisms.
- Step 4:** Cover these layers with brown garden vegetation to ensure the food scraps are covered.
- Step 5:** Water well until the compost is moist but not wet. Repeat step 2-5 as required. Aerate the compost by turning with a garden fork or similar weekly. You could also place pipes or garden stakes through the heap to allow air flow.

Solutions to common compost problems

1. **Odour** - your compost may smell because it is too wet or doesn't have enough air. Add some dry brown material such as leaves if it is too moist or turn the heap to aerate it. Add 2-3 handfuls of lime, dolomite or wood ash to reduce acidity.
2. **Attracting vermin** – vermin such as rats or mice are attracted to meat, bread and dairy products in the compost so avoid placing these in the compost. Turn the heap regularly (vermin dislike disturbance) and lay fine mesh, chicken wire or metal sheeting (with drainage holes) under the bin or heap to ensure vermin cannot enter the heap. Add some lime to reduce acidic and anaerobic heaps that attract cockroaches or maggots and flies. Ensure the heap is covered to reduce the likelihood of vermin.
3. **Slow to breakdown** - it should take 8 - 12 weeks for good, aerobic compost. If your compost is slow it might mean:
 - a. there are not enough nutrients so, add 2-3 handfuls of blood and bone or chicken manure;
 - b. there is not enough air so, turn the heap more often and compost more coarse material;
 - c. there is not enough water so, water the heap!: or
 - d. the compost is not hot enough so, cover the compost with an insulating material in winter if it gets too cold and ensure it is in a sunny location.