



# HOME COMPOSTING

CARLOW  
COUNTY COUNCIL



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## What is Composting?

Composting is the term given to the natural process by which plant and animal matter is broken down into a rich dark, soil-like material under controlled conditions. Composting is such a natural process that it needs little know-how. Straightforward steps and rule of thumbs will lead to successful compost every time.

Materials suitable for composting account for up to [half of household waste](#). By making

home compost you can have a major impact on your own waste reduction while also improving the quality and fertility of your soil. Kitchen and garden waste is turned into a valuable raw material.



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## How Does It Work?

When kitchen and garden waste is piled in a heap it creates ideal conditions for micro-organisms to break down the waste. Decomposition causes the pile to warm up. Then more micro-organisms become involved to break down the material into smaller and smaller pieces. As the compost cools it becomes

attractive to worms and other insects that complete the job of transforming the pile of waste into dark crumbly compost.

[Carlow County Council](#) offer compost bin at a subsidised rate. The bins are durable and lidded and have proved very easy to use. They have provided many locals with crumbly, rich

# How to Compost

## Step 1. Setting up

Locate your compost bin within easy access to your home so that you can add waste quickly and regularly. Site your composting bin on free draining soil to allow the movement of micro-organisms. If you can't find a dry place in your garden create a small mound of gravel a few inches above the surrounding soil. If possible chose partial shade, as any warmth will speed up the process.

## Step 2. Adding the right ingredients

First place a layer of 'Brown' material or dry material as the first layer in the

container to allow for aeration. Straw, paper or twigs should do.

Green material or wet material and brown material can be added in alternate layers 5cm to 10cm thick.

Always shred materials as these break down more quickly.



*Why buy compost when you can make your own.*

# Choosing the Right Ingredients

### GREEN

Grass cuttings  
Kitchen scraps  
Vegetable peelings  
Young weeds  
Poultry manures

### MEDIUM

Tea leaves  
Coffee grinds  
Fruit peelings  
(limit the amount of Citrus fruits)

### BROWN

Egg shells  
Wood ash  
Small hedge clippings  
Sawdust & shavings  
Coal and peat ashes  
Autumn leaves  
Torn Paper

### AVOID

Meat, chicken, fish  
Vigorous weeds  
Glossy magazines  
Diseased plants

*'not too wet and not too dry'*

The most important thing is getting a good mixture of Green and Brown material. If the mixture is too wet the movement of air is restricted and offensive odours can occur, add some Brown material to solve this. If the composting process is very slow because too many hedge clipping or twigs are there then add some Green material.

## Step 3. Compost ventilation

As the compost pile is relatively moist, it will condense, reducing the amount of air in it. Regular poking with a stick or turning with a fork will create ventilation and also mix the layers.



*Enrich your soil with home compost*

## Using Your Home Compost

Your compost is ready when it is dark, crumbly and sweet smelling, some woody branches and eggshells may still remain. You can use your compost in a number of ways.

**Soil Improver.** Enrich your soil by digging in your compost into vegetable and flower beds. Add your compost into clay soils to give better aeration and sandy soils to hold the particles together to keep moisture.

**Mulching.** Spread a layer of compost about two inches thick around plants to suppress

weeds, improve the soil and hold in moisture.

**Top dressing.** Compost is ideal as a slow release fertiliser. Sieve the compost and spread over a lawn to add nutrients.

**Potting mixes.** Sieve your compost and add equal parts of garden soil, sand and your fine compost to have the perfect potting compost.



*Reward you  
garden*

## Useful Information

Don't leave food scraps on top of your pile as they may attract flies. Add a layer of brown material and ensure the pile is well aerated.

Keep odours away by having a good mix of brown and green material and aerating the compost regularly. Add extra brown material to solve any odour problem.

Generally speaking there is no need for compost activators. Introduce new micro-organisms by regularly adding a few shovelfuls of garden soil into your bin.

Don't add vigorous perennial wild flowers such as docks, dandelion and bindweed. These plants will grow throughout your compost. Do not add wild flowers that have seeds as you may end up spreading them in your garden.

Avoid adding diseased plants to the bin, the temperature may not be high enough to render them harmless.

*Add extra brown material  
to solve any odour  
problem.*



*Try peat free  
gardening*

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#### Further information

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## Why Compost?

### For yourself

- Allows every individual to make a real difference to the environment.
- Its simple and easy
- It gives you rich crumbly compost!

### For the soil and plants

- Improves soil fertility, plant health, drainage on heavy soils, water holding capacity of lighter soils, and soil aeration.
- Makes the soil easier to work
- It enlivens the soil by feeding soil organisms
- Acts as a slow release fertiliser
- Adds trace elements to the soil
- Can increase the pH of the soil

### For the environment

- Reduces waste pollution, the use of chemical fertilisers, greenhouse gases by reducing burning of waste
- Replaces peat based compost which is good for our peatlands.

