



WILD PATCH INFORMATION SHEET

Compost heaps

Create your Wild Patch

Compost heaps teem with wildlife and are a great way to increase the biodiversity in the garden. As well as the important decomposer organisms and invertebrates they also provide shelter and food for many mammals, and insect food for birds.

Commercial composters are readily available. Some councils will supply them. A home-built one is just as effective using pallets or wire netting to contain the heap. Position the heap in a sunny place, ideally on soil to allow organisms to infiltrate. To reduce the likelihood of rats it is advisable to put a wire mesh across the base. This allows for the free passage of small mammals – but not rats.

Some shrubs nearby will allow a safe place for animals moving in and out of the heap.

What is compost?

Anything that was recently living will decompose to soil. Composting is an acceleration of that natural process, and produces a soil that is rich in nutrients.

How to compost

The recipe for an active compost heap should consist of an approximate balance of 50% 'green', nitrogen-rich waste (kitchen waste, weeds, grass clippings), and 50% 'brown', carbon-rich waste (plant prunings, paper, dead leaves, cardboard).

Efficient composting is largely about getting the correct balance. One can feel the heat at the centre of a 'happy' heap. The general rules are:

- if the mixture is too wet and sloppy, more brown waste should be added.
- if too dry, more green waste should be introduced, or water can be added.

In a nutshell...

Recycling your green and brown waste is good for the garden and good for the planet – and is a positive thing anyone can do for wildlife and the garden.

Composting worms (red worms, brandlings, tiger worms) will be attracted to composting material. They will be even happier if you provide an attractive base layer: damp, scrunched-up cardboard could provide this.

To help speed things up more, a commercial compost accelerator can be added. Human urine does a similar job!

A light sprinkling of healthy top soil will help add more micro-organisms, or a better boost is to add some of a previous batch of compost.

Turning or stirring every month or so can also promote composting by mixing and introducing more air to this aerobic process.

Another method to help the process is to chip or shred material in a machine designed for the job. This reduces bulk and massively increases the surface area of the composting material.

Garden compost takes six months to two years to mature to a brown, crumbly, friable mixture ready to use on the flower or vegetable beds.

Left: Pallets are great for building a basic framework to contain your compost heap. This photo shows the mature heap at left, ready to add to vegetable and flower beds, and the active heap at right.



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Why compost?

Apart from the benefits to wildlife, composting is good because:

- Much vegetable type waste that goes into your general waste bin can be composted.
- The bin is less smelly!
- Less waste goes into landfill sites, which in turn reduces greenhouse gases – especially methane.
- Composting can save you money, with less need to buy compost for the garden.
- There is less chance that peat-based composts are purchased and used. Helping to reduce extraction from exhaustable, fragile, peat bogs.
- Compost makes rich, diverse soils.
- Food grown in healthy soil produces healthy food (and people).
- It can be interesting, satisfying and easy.

DID YOU KNOW?
A teaspoon of ompost can contain billions of microscopic organisms, consisting of thousands of species.

Further information

Buglife www.buglife.org.uk

Earth Easy www.eartheasy.com

Garden Organic www.homecomposting.org.uk

British Hedgehog Preservation Society
www.britishhedgehogs.org.uk

Henry Doubleday Research Organisation
www.hdra.org.uk

The Community Composting Network
www.communitycompost.org

The Composting Association www.compost.org.uk

The Royal Horticultural Society www.rhs.ork.uk

The Wildlife Garden Project
www.wildlifegardenproject.com

The Wildlife Trusts www.wildlifetrusts.org.uk

Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP)
www.wrap.org.uk

Wild About Gardens www.wildaboutgardens.org.uk

Wildlife and wildlife gardening
www.naturalsurroundings

What to compost

- Any vegetable or less woody garden waste. Greens rot quickly, providing nitrogen and moisture that the heap needs.
- Fruit and vegetable waste, and peelings from the kitchen.
- Grass clippings in thin layers.
- Dead leaves, torn cardboard and scrunched up paper. This is slower to rot and provides air pockets allowing aerobic activity.
- Compostable pet bedding and manure from herbivorous pets or other animals (for example, a bit of horse muck will turbo-boost the heap).
- Tea bags and coffee grounds.
- Wood ash (not too much at once).
- Sawdust (a sprinkling or thin layer adds carbon).
- Human urine.
- Eggshells, but not if your soil is quite alkaline.

What NOT to compost

- Cat and dog litter.
- Pernicious roots and weeds that might regenerate, such as bindweed or couch grass.
- Very glossy printed products.
- Diseased plant material.
- Bread, fish, meat or dairy products.
- Coal ash.



Contact us

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