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Compost made easy



Composting is a great way to dispose of food waste and help your home-grown fruit and veg to flourish, explains **Caroline Stacey**

Even good cooks throw away food. But if you give leftovers a new lease of life as compost, they won't go to waste. It's the green way to get rid of potato peelings, apple cores and scraps from the chopping board, and to cut down on landfill and greenhouse gases from rotting rubbish. Plus there's a payback. It's what gardeners call 'black gold' – kitchen scraps transformed into free nourishing compost for plants.

A third of waste food could be put to better use as compost, although the idea of composting often deters the uninitiated. Isn't it a nuisance, a vermin magnet and a waste of space in a small garden? Not if you've got the basics right. A caddy kept in the kitchen shouldn't smell if emptied regularly. A bin tucked away in the garden will have a lid to seal in smells and, if you keep the nasties out of the compost – cooked food, meat and dairy – the pests will stay away.

JUST THREE SIMPLE STEPS

1 Choose either a slatted wooden container, preferred by gardeners, or a plastic dustbin-size bin, which is perfect for smaller gardens. Place your composter in a sunny or semi-shaded spot, as the heat helps the waste to break down.

2 Simply top up the composter with kitchen scraps and garden cuttings. As BBC *Gardeners' World's* Joe Swift says: 'The key is to have a balanced mix of waste and to build up the

temperature. Vegetable matter, soft plant stems and grass cuttings are rich in nitrogen, whereas cardboard and paper are rich in carbon.' Go for a 50-50 mix of 'greens' and 'browns', layering them up like a cake:

- ✓ **Greens** Fruit and veg waste, tea bags, coffee grounds, grass and plant cuttings add nitrogen.
- ✓ **Browns** Egg cartons, cereal packets (torn into pieces so they break down quicker), sawdust and straw are carbon rich.
- ✓ **Crushed eggshells.**
- ✗ **Don't compost meat,**

fish, dairy or cooked food as it could attract rats.

3 Leave the compost to do its thing – your food leftovers and garden waste break down amazingly quickly. Mix or turn the compost every week or so to allow essential air into it.

After at least a few months, and up to about a year, your leftovers will be unrecognisably brown, crumbly, earthy smelling and packed with nutrients. It is now ready for you to use to enrich your garden.

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What about a wormery?

Wormeries deal with food waste in a small outdoor space and provide a small, regular supply of plant food. The worms won't eat everything – no meat, dairy, onions or citrus – and can't cope with too much food at once.

- **Compost Awareness Week starts on Sunday 3 May – find more information at compostawarenessweek.org.uk**
- **See a step-by-step guide to building your own compost bin at gardenersworld.com/how-to/projects/compost-bin**

Two ideas to try

In my small, shady garden I didn't want a bin hogging a prime position. Also, it seemed a shame to throw away cooked food like the scrapings from the children's plates, which can't go in a conventional compost bin.

So, persuaded by a generous discount through my local council, I opted for the shade-loving [Green Johanna](#) hot composter, which scoffs the lot – even what's banned from most compost bins – because it's sealed to keep vermin out. Although it's no smaller than other bins, it sits unobtrusively under a tree, warming up inside and making compost more quickly than a normal bin with a mixture of two-thirds kitchen and one-third garden waste. Contact your local council to see what is available or visit recyclenow.com/compost, which may also help you to buy a bargain bin.

Compost in your kitchen

Bokashi are natty little caddies that live in the kitchen and deal with trash in a flash. Developed in Japan for apartment dwellers, they create a nutritious, earth-enriching substance from any old food including cooked, dairy, meat and fish (some of which wormeries can't cope with – see below left).

The process is quick and odourless thanks to a malted bran containing micro-organisms, which ferments rather than putrefies the waste. The resulting liquid plant food and pickled-looking compost can then be used in the garden or added to a compost bin. You have to buy the bran and have two bins to use alternately, and there are no council discounts on bokashis. The bokashi is great for food waste, but doesn't take brown material. So if, like me, you have a tiny kitchen, you may prefer a Green Johanna, which deals with all the kitchen waste the bokashi takes – and more – out in the garden. You can order a bokashi and bran, from £19.56, from originalorganics.co.uk



GoodFood Reader offer

This easy-to-assemble composter is made with pressure-treated FSC-certified timber and guaranteed against rot for 15 years. Compost is contained and restricted from spreading. H70 x W113 x D113cm. Just £34.99 including p&p.

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