

Guidance note

How to make compost

What is compost?

Compost is the rotted-down remains of plant material. It is a rich source of nutrients to help your plants grow and crops yield - and costs nothing to make.

Good materials for composting are kitchen waste such as peelings and cores, lawn trimmings, other green garden waste including small twiggy material, dried leaves, wood shavings and shredded paper. Avoid fat, meat, fish or oily materials as these can attract rats and flies.

Compost has to heat up in order to rot and the compost heap needs to be a certain size in order to do this. A good size is about 1m high and 1m wide – 1m is about 3 feet. It can be a pile on the ground, or in a pit. The heap should be in the shade so that it keeps moist.

Ideally, the heap consists of:

- 25% – 50% greens (grass, food, manure, etc)
- 75% - 50% browns (leaves, paper, wood shavings, small twigs, etc)

Collect all the materials separately, and when you have enough mix them up in the heap in layers 3 - 6 inches thick, finishing with a layer of dry leaves. Add some manure (from any source) in the mix to provide the essential bacteria to start the rot. Water it well and keep it covered: a piece of old carpet, plastic or tarpaulin is ideal.

The heap will heat up for a few weeks and then cool down. You can check the stage of rotting by inserting a metal rod into the heap for a few minutes, it will feel hot at the end which was in the middle of the heap. Once the heap has cooled, uncover it and turn it over with a spade, mixing up the layers well. The heap should heat up again. The total process will take 3 to 6 months, and results in fine, crumbly, sweet smelling compost, ready to make your garden grow.

Apply 1 – 2 kg of compost per metre squared of ground - 1 kg is about as much as you can hold with both hands. Dig it into planting holes, or under fruit trees. For pots, mix one third compost with two thirds soil.

For further advice please contact Farmer Support at ANRD on 24724.

