

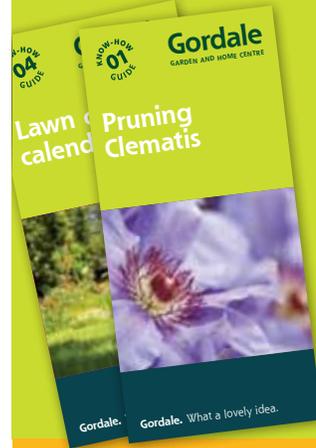


## Getting the compost out and using it

- 1 First, don't forget to always use gloves when handling any compost.
- 2 Usage depends on the type of compost bin, however the majority have a hatch at the bottom.
- 3 Remove the hatch to check compost is ready, then if a small amount is required just remove with a trowel.
- 4 For larger quantities it is best to remove the whole compost bin. Push the bin backwards and forwards in a rocking motion. Lift the bin up and off. The contents should remain in situ with the bin acting a bit like a jelly mould. To make life easier remove the bottom hatch before you start.
- 5 You now have a compost 'cake' with a top layer of recently added materials, a middle layer of partially rotted material and a bottom layer of finished compost.
- 6 Remove the top layers with a garden fork, ideally into a wheelbarrow as these can be added back into the compost bin after you have accessed the compost from the bottom.
- 7 If you don't need all the compost you have made in one go, bag it up and store for later in the year – you can store finished compost for up to a year.



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- 02 Trees – how far from the house?
- 03 Plants to attract birds and insects
- 04 Lawn care calendar
- 05 Choosing the right hedge for you
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GUIDE

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# Easy composting

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## Why Compost

Compost is the single most important supplement you can give your garden soil.

It is also one of the easiest ways of adding nutrient-rich humus to your soil. Your home-made compost will fuel your plants' growth, plus it's free and easy to make, and good for the environment.

### Benefits of Composting

**Soil conditioner:** Your compost creates rich humus for the lawn and garden, adding nutrients to your plants and helping to retain moisture in the soil.

**Introduces beneficial organisms to the soil:** Microscopic organisms in compost help aerate the soil, break down organic material for plant use and help to ward off plant disease.

**Composting is good for the environment:** Composting offers a natural alternative to chemical fertilizers.

**Recycles kitchen and garden waste:** Composting can divert as much as 30% of household waste away from the bin.

**Reduces landfill waste:** Many landfill sites in the UK are filling quickly, despite as much as one-third of landfill waste being made up of compostable materials.

## How to Compost

**1** Locate your compost bin or heap in a reasonably sunny position on bare soil as this allows worms and other beneficial organisms to enter the compost heap.

Compost heaps are quicker to compost as they can be turned regularly. Compost bins are enclosed on the sides and top, and open on the bottom so they sit directly on the ground. These bins are inexpensive, but it is difficult to turn the compost, so it can take longer to produce compost. However they keep the compost neatly enclosed, odour-free and protected from pests.

**2** Start your compost bin with a brown layer, twigs and straw, which will assist with drainage, then try to alternate between green and brown layers.

**3** Add the right ingredients: All compostable materials are either carbon or nitrogen-based and getting this balance right is the secret to a successful compost heap.

| Do Compost                   |  | Don't Compost  |
|------------------------------|--|--|
| Greens (Nitrogen)            | Browns (Carbons)   |  |
| Fresh Grass                  | Dead leaves, pine needles  | Weeds with seeds   |
| Flowers                      | Straw  | Invasive weeds<br>le. Couch grass, convolvulus, mares tail |
| Garden clippings             | Shredded paper   | Meat, fish and dairy                                       |
| Annual weeds – not in flower | Wood chips (shred branches so they are no more than 1-2" in size (2.5 - 5cm) | Cooking oils, grease                                       |
| Veg scraps, egg shells       | Cardboard, toilet rolls  | Diseased plants  |
| Tea bags                     |  | Chemicals  |
| Coffee grounds               |  | Animal products  |
| Green manures                |  |  |

A simple rule is to mix *one-third green* to *two-thirds brown*; too much green nitrogen results in a smelly heap, so when in doubt, add a bit more brown.

**Accelerators and activators:** Products such as 'Garotta' are sometimes added where green waste is in short supply. They contain high levels of nitrogen (a nutrient found in green waste), but should not be necessary if green waste is plentiful.

**Lime:** People sometimes think you need to add lime to the compost heap, but there is no need to do so

- 4** Keep the heap moist.
- 5** Try to cover the heap as much as possible with plastic sheeting, wood, even old carpet as this helps retain moisture and heat with in the heap without it becoming too wet.
- 6** Wait: Composting can take 6 – 12 months so now you have to let nature take its course. Keep adding greens and browns to top up your compost.
- 7** Weekly maintenance for a traditional compost heap
  - Stir or turn the pile
  - Water the pile to moistness
  - Add green material if the pile feels cold
  - Add brown material if the pile starts to smell
  - Leave the worms and white fungus alone
  - Maintain a one-third to two-thirds green to brown mix
- 8** The compost is ready to use when it has turned into a crumbly dark material, resembling thick, moist soil and gives off an earthy, fresh aroma. Don't worry if it looks a little lumpy with twigs and bits of egg shell, this is normal.

### Problems

**Wet, slimy and strong-smelling compost:** Too little air and too much water are often to blame. Cover the heap to protect against rain and add more brown waste, such as chopped woody material, shredded woodchip, straw or paper.

**Dry and fibrous with little rotting:** Usually caused by too little moisture and too much brown material. Add more green waste, or try a commercial activator or accelerator such as 'Garotta'.

**Flies:** Well-run compost bins don't produce swarms of flies, but if you do see any, then make sure you cover kitchen waste with garden waste after adding it to the heap and check that moisture levels are not too high, causing insufficient air in the heap.