

## Composting

By Teresa and Andrew Widd

### What is compost?

Garden compost is the result of the slow decomposition of plants and animal (organic) matter by living organisms, to give a rich dark brown product that looks like soil. Compost can be re-introduced to the garden to provide essential minerals to replenish the soil

Compost is also sold in plastic bags in garden centres, these specially formulated products are not the same as garden compost and are more correctly called 'growing media'.

### Basic guidelines

Compost can be made in the back garden following a few simple rules. It is the best way to recycle suitable materials.

The compost bin should be somewhere accessible with access to direct sunlight. Lots of people have mini compost bins in the kitchen which they empty into the outside compost bin regularly.

Pallets make a simple compost bin (for example:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v2F8FEvx6N8>)

Try to layer your materials if possible but it doesn't always work out that way.

The bottom of the heap should be directly on the ground to encourage worms and other insects to enter.

Start the bottom of the compost heap with a 10 – 15 cm (4" - 6") layer of woody material to allow air into the heap.

The rest of the heap should consist of alternate layer of green and brown materials (see below).

Keep the top of the heap covered with an old carpet, black plastic, thick cardboard etc as this retains the heat and moisture which helps to break down the plant material quicker.

Compost can take anywhere between 12 weeks and 18 months to become usable. In this time, try to turn it at least twice if possible as this will speed up the breaking down process (in the case of the pallet heaps, place polythene etc on the ground opposite your heap and throw the material onto the sheeting from the compost heap, once empty, throw it back into the pallet compost heap and you have turned it).

When turning the heap, if it looks too dry - give it a water.

If the heap is too wet and slimy, mix plenty of brown waste in to absorb the excess moisture and increase the air flow.

## Green waste materials

Animal bedding (only from plant eating animals)	Annual weeds
Bedding plants	Carrot tops
Coffee grounds	Cut flowers
Fruit (not too many apples or citrus fruits)	Grass clippings (don't put on too thickly)
Hedge clippings, only if soft growth	House plants
Kitchen peelings (not potatoes)	Nettles (not roots or seed heads)
Perennial plants	Perennial weeds, not roots and seed heads
Rhubarb leaves	Tea leaves and bags
Wool and cotton	

## Brown waste materials

Autumn leaves	Cardboard (preferably torn up)
Egg shells	Envelopes (only the paper part)
Sawdust and shavings (only in small amounts)	Shredded or screwed up paper
Straw and Hay	

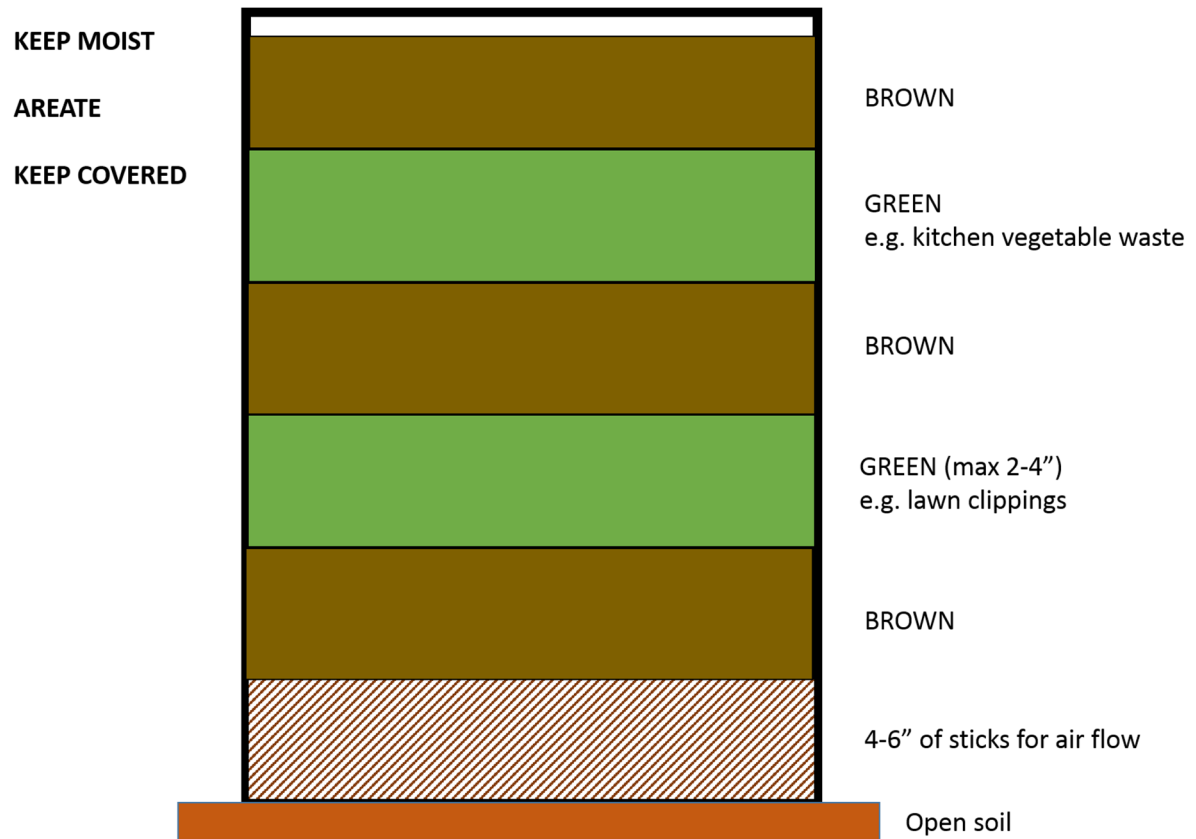
## Compost with caution

Apples	Large amounts of apples will stop the compost heap working well
Autumn leaves	These are better composted in a separate leaf pile to make leaf mould which makes an excellent mulch
Citrus Peel	It is very acidic, and can upset worms, do not add too much
Evergreen leaves	Hard shiny leaves take a long time to break down
Plant debris	Chop up thick, tough stems. Shred woody material
Poisonous plants	These are fine to compost but take care not to inhale poisonous fumes when shredding plants like laurel
Potatoes	Do not compost blight infected potato tubers or eyes as new shoots may grow. Whole potatoes take a long time to break down
Seaweed	Composts well, but if taken from the beach can remove valuable wildlife habitats, use small amounts of locally sourced seaweed

## Do not compost

<b>Bread</b>	<b>Cat litter</b>
<b>Coal ash</b>	<b>Cooked kitchen waste</b>
<b>Dairy products</b>	<b>Diseased plants</b>
<b>Dog and cat faeces</b>	<b>Drink cartons</b>
<b>Food packaging incl. biodegradable</b>	<b>Meat, fish and bones</b>
<b>Nappies</b>	<b>Perennial weed roots and seed heads</b>
<b>Potato tubers and peelings</b>	<b>Seed heads</b>
<b>Soil</b>	<b>Woody Brassica stalks</b>
<b>Woollen carpets</b>	

## Compost construction



Based on image from: <http://www.acrd.bc.ca/home-composting>