

How to ... start a compost bin

The particularly nasty greenhouse gas methane oozes out of organic rubbish rotting away underground at the tip. You can cut this out by using a worm farm or compost bin at home.

Using a compost bin immediately brings to mind the stench of rotting food and swarming flies.

Rest assured, having a compost bin need not be like a horror movie. It is extremely easy to manage and require only moderate attention, although you will need to concentrate a little bit in the early phases.

And the best part? You'll be saving loads of waste (around 40%) from going to landfill, saving heaps of emissions from entering the atmosphere, creating juicy and delicious compost for your veggie patch, and putting a little bit of love back into our environment.

And the kids can get involved. In fact, why not hand over composting responsibilities to the kids? Great idea, why didn't we think of that...?



So, how to do it?

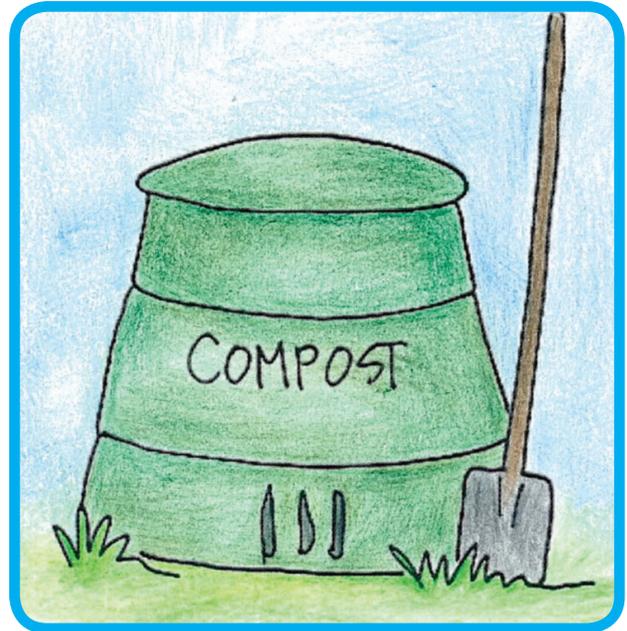
1. Purchase one from your local hardware store or contact your local council about where you can purchase compost bins.
2. Think about where your compost bin will go. You'll need to find somewhere outside that is easy to access but not too close to eating and outdoor play areas. After all, doing the right thing for our environment doesn't always smell of roses.
3. How will you get food scraps to the bin? Smaller bins that can be emptied into the compost at the end of the day are a good solution, as is a roster of 'bin emptiers' and 'compost turners' (this needs to be done once a month). They're very sexy job descriptions so you're bound to have no shortage of volunteers.
4. Filling your bin. Start with a thick layer of coarse material (around 15cm), such as twigs or mulch. This will act as drainage, and is a very important measure to avoid sludge. Then begin to fill your bin! Use a three-layer system, starting with garden clippings and kitchen scraps. Top these with dry leaves and paper, and then sprinkle with water. Sprinkling soil or finished compost on top of food scraps will make a richer compost and help reduce odours.
5. Maintenance. The key word here is 'aeration'. Aerate your compost heap weekly to avoid unpleasant pongs and methane by turning it with a garden fork. Or you can place garden stakes or pipes through the heap to allow air to travel through your compost heap. You can buy the very fancy Aerobin that requires no turning or mucking about.
6. You will also need to clarify what can and can't be included in a compost heap i.e.: Cabbage = good, Dead cat = Not so good.

For more information on how you can help our environment, or to make some suggestions of your own, please go to www.coolaustralia.org

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What to add to your compost bin:

- Vegetable and food scraps
- Tea leaves and tea bags
- Coffee grounds
- Egg shells
- Used vegetable cooking oil
- Vacuum cleaner dust
- Soft stems
- Dead flowers
- Grass cuttings in layers
- Fallen leaves (in layers)
- Weeds
- Old potting mix
- Old newspapers (wet)
- Sawdust (not from treated timber)
- Wood ash
- Human and animal hair



What to keep out of your compost bin:

- Meat and dairy products
- Bones
- Fat
- Bread or cake (may attract mice)
- Animal manures (especially the droppings of cats and dogs)
- Diseased plants
- Large branches
- Weeds that have seeds or underground stems
- Metals, plastic, glass
- Magazines
- Sawdust from treated timber
- Citrus, leek and onion

For more information about composting, please visit the following sites:

Clean Up Australia - Composting

<http://www.cleanup.org.au/au/LivingGreener/composting.html>

International Composting Awareness Week

<http://www.compostweek.com.au/>

Sustainable Gardening Australia - Composting

<http://www.sgaonline.org.au/?tag=composting&orderby=title&order=asc>

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