

# YOUR GUIDE TO COMPOSTING



NPDC



TE KAUNIHERA Ā ROHE O  
WHAKAAHURANGI  
STRATFORD  
DISTRICT COUNCIL



Te Kaunihera o Taranaki ki Te Tonga  
South Taranaki  
District Council

## Traditional composting

is simply the method of breaking down organic materials (kitchen and garden waste) in a large container or heap.



Composting has many benefits for the environment:

- it diverts waste from landfill
- it can be used as fertiliser
- it improves the condition of soils.

# HOW TO COMPOST

Follow the **ADAM** principle for good compost.

Good compost comes from **ALIVENESS**, which is created by having **DIVERSITY**, a variety of materials, e.g. leaves, small sticks, twigs and food scraps, hair, dust, teabags, with **AERATION** to aid the process. Not enough air and the compost will become smelly, the right amount of **MOISTURE**, not too wet not too dry, is necessary for the compost to live.

**A**

**ALIVENESS** - Compost needs living organisms to break down the waste and release the minerals and nutrients needed to make rich soil-like compost. Each living organism in the compost has a different but important role to play in creating the right conditions for good compost. Some of the living organisms, such as bacteria, are too small for you to see - but they are still very important.

**D**

**DIVERSITY** - Compost needs lots of different ingredients to keep it healthy. Different ingredients make sure the compost has all the right minerals and nutrients. Anything that has lived once can live again in your compost.

**A**

**AERATION** - Compost needs air or it will become smelly. Turning the compost adds the air needed to ensure no bad smells.

**M**

**MOISTURE** - Compost needs water to live. It should be moist but not dripping with water.

# COMPOST CONTAINERS and heaps

There are many types of containers that you can use to compost at home. Some of these are:

- Plastic bins with ventilation holes or slits
- Plastic bins without ventilation
- Metal drums with holes punched in the side and with the base removed
- Rotating drum units (tumblers)
- Enclosures made from timber (planks or sleepers), bricks or chicken wire.

If you prefer, you can make compost in open heaps, but they should be covered with either a plastic sheet or some hessian to prevent the heaps from drying out in hot weather. **You could even bury kitchen scraps in holes in garden beds.**

## IN GROUND SYSTEM

An alternative option is to obtain a pipe or cut the bottom out of a bucket and place it two-thirds into the ground. Simply place your fruit and vegetable scraps in the pipe and worms will come from afar to consume your waste. This method has the benefit of enriching the soil around it and is ideal for vegetable gardens or nutrient loving plants. The pipe or bucket can be moved around as required. You will need a lid on top to keep the moisture and heat in and the light out.

## Using COMPOST



- Compost is ready to use when it is dark and smells earthy (no sharp ammonia smell).
- Place compost around the **DRIP-LINE** of plants (where the water falls off the plant's leaves).
- Keep compost away from the stems of plants.

# EASY COMPOST RECIPE

## Ingredients

- Compost bin
- Broken up twigs, prunings, dry leaves, mulch, grass clippings, flowers
- Torn newspaper
- Food scraps
- Finished compost (rich potting mix, soil, dynamic lifter, manure, straw etc)
- Water
- Hessian bag or other covering layer
- Air

## METHOD:

1. Choose a position for the compost bin - things to consider when choosing a position:
  - well drained
  - sunny
  - close to a hose
  - room for storage of mulch or woody materials
  - room for storage of finished compost
2. Put a layer (10-15cm, about the width of four fingers) of coarse material (broken up sticks, twigs, prunings, dry leaves and newspaper) on the bottom of the heap. This allows air to flow through the heap.
3. Add a bucket of finished compost as a starter.
4. Add food scraps to the heap.
5. Add a layer of vegetation (mulch, leaves, etc.). For every bucket of food scraps add two buckets of vegetation or other material. Continue until the bin is full, or alternatively you can add material in any

order depending when you have it available keeping the diversity principles in mind.

6. Add water, if necessary, to ensure enough moisture.
7. Add air by turning or stirring.
8. Cover with hessian bag or layer of newspaper - this helps retain the moisture and keeps out the flies.

When bin is full, do not add any more food scraps. Keep moist by adding water (if necessary) until no food scraps are visible and the compost smells fresh and earthy - this will take 8-12 weeks. Stirring the compost once a week (no more) will speed up the process.

It is now finished compost ready for use on the garden. You can set up another compost bin while this is cooking, so you have one active bin while the other is maturing its compost.





## WHAT YOU CAN ADD TO A COMPOST HEAP:



Vegetable and fruit scraps



Fallen leaves (in layers)



Seaweed



Coffee grounds



Soft stems



Dead flowers



Egg shells



Old newspapers



Grass cuttings (in layers)



Sawdust (not from treated wood)



Wood ash



Tea leaves and tea bags (paper bags only)



## WHAT NOT TO ADD TO A COMPOST HEAP:



Meat and dairy products (attracts rodents)



Diseased plants



Metals, plastic, glass



Animal manures



Fat



Magazines (shiny-foiled)



Large branches



Weeds that have seeds or underground stems



Bread or cake



Bones



Sawdust from treated wood

# COMPOSTING

## Troubleshooting

### 1 SMELLY COMPOST

Four things that could cause smelly compost:

- too wet
- not enough air
- too much food
- 'other' materials (meat or dairy etc.)

**Fix it by:**

- Stirring in dry leaves, mulch or soil
- Turning the compost to get more air in
- Adding two or three handfuls of garden lime or dolomite
- Mixing food with shredded newspaper before adding to the bin

### 2 UNWELCOME VISITORS

Ants, cockroaches, flies, mice, rats.

**Fix it by:**

- Ensuring food is covered by vegetation/mulch
- Adding lime and turning compost to discourage ants and cockroaches
- Keeping meat out of the compost
- Turning the compost regularly

### 3 TOO DRY

Compost should always be spongy, and squeezable.

**Fix it by:**

- Adding water

### 4 COMPOSTING TOO SLOW

Usually happens if compost is too wet or too dry or not enough heat.

**Fix it by:**

- Adding newspaper and turning (if too wet)
- Adding water and turning (if too dry)
- Stirring in some dynamic lifter, old compost or grass clippings

### 5 NOT HEATING UP

**Fix it by:**

- Add more NITROGEN material - e.g. young grass clippings, blood and bone meal
- Check MOISTURE level - (dry heaps don't heat up!) add more water when mixing
- Mix the heap more regularly with spiral mixing tool
- Add a handful of lime or dolomite