

## Commonly asked questions and answers

### My compost is full of flies – what shall I do?

Flies are completely harmless; they live on the kitchen scraps that you put in the compost. You can control them by covering the scraps with a layer of soil or cardboard and leave the lid off for a day or two; when there is no food for them, they fly away. Leaving the lid off partially allows access to beetles and spiders, which will eat the flies and larvae. Remember that little creatures such as woodlice, beetles, worms, spiders, slugs and snails are essential to make compost happen, so be pleased if you manage to attract lots of them!

### I'm worried about attracting rats.

It is unlikely that your compost will attract rats, but there are steps you can take if you are concerned. Don't add cooked food, meat or fish, mix in kitchen scraps well and cover with a layer of sawdust or soil to mask the smell. You could also put a sheet of wire mesh or broken paving slabs under the heap. Turning the contents regularly also helps to stop vermin tunnelling and nesting.

### What do I do if my compost is too wet and smelly or too dry?

Compost should be damp but not dripping. If it is too wet, then add more crumpled newspaper, shredded cardboard, dry and woody clippings or pet straw (browns). If it smells bad, then you probably need to add more air, so just give it a good mix around. If it is too dry, add more fruit and vegetable peelings, water or cold tea (greens) and mix well.

### I have lots of prunings that are too woody to compost, what shall I do?

Chop them into smaller bits. If you have lots, hire a shredder from a tool hire shop. The chippings can be added to your compost, or used as garden mulch to help control weeds and keep in moisture. Alternatively, place the extra in your green waste sack for collection.

### Grass mowings turn into black sludge in my compost – what am I doing wrong?

Don't dump the grass cuttings in all at once. To make successful compost you need a good mixture of materials and layers, so stir the grass in with the rest of the heap.

### Can I put weeds in my compost?

Generally, yes, many weeds are ideal for composting especially if you compost quickly. A hot heap will kill weed seeds. If you compost bit by bit the process will be cooler and slower, and the roots that are not killed in the composting process are likely to grow again. Therefore, it's probably better not to put in fresh perennial weeds such as bindweed, ground elder or couch grass. However, some gardeners will put nasty weeds like this in to black bin bags or buckets of water. They leave them for a couple of weeks and then chop them into the compost heap which works well.



## So how do I get a compost bin?

If you want a compost bin you can either:

**Order a bin** - North Somerset Council supplies compost bins to North Somerset residents at a subsidised rate. To order a bin contact Streets and Open Spaces on 01934 888 802, or visit our website: [www.n-somerset.gov.uk/composting](http://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/composting)

The bin will be delivered to you FREE of charge!

**Build one** – You can make your own compost bin, for further information call Streets and Open Spaces or have a look at the fact sheet on the home composting website at: [www.homecomposting.org.uk/content/view/31/52/](http://www.homecomposting.org.uk/content/view/31/52/)

If you live outside North Somerset contact your local council for information about composting offers in your area.



## Want to know more?

Call Streets and Open Spaces on: 01934 888 802

Or you could try the following websites:  
[www.n-somerset.gov.uk/composting](http://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/composting) • [www.compost.org.uk](http://www.compost.org.uk)  
[www.recyclenow.com/home\\_composting](http://www.recyclenow.com/home_composting)

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 **recycle**  
for North Somerset



## How to be a rotter



Heaps of hints on home composting

[www.n-somerset.gov.uk/composting](http://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/composting)

## What is compost?



Compost is a rich, soil like substance made up of decomposed food and garden waste. This rots down (with the help of bacteria, fungi and worms) to produce a nutritious all-in-one plant food, soil conditioner and mulch (which covers the soil to keep moisture in and weeds away). It is excellent for gardens, potted plants, allotments and window boxes. You can either spread compost on the surface to keep weeds at bay or dig it into the soil to improve the fertility and structure of the soil. Then sit back and watch your plants flourish because they love your home-made compost.



## Why make compost at all?

It's not just gardeners who compost – millions of people who care about the environment are now adding composting to their recycling activities. Making your own compost benefits the environment, gardens, and your pocket by saving money on compost and fertilisers. Under European law, Britain must reduce the amount of 'waste' going to landfill (buried in large holes in the ground), particularly waste which can be composted.

Up to a third of the average household bin is made up of waste that could be composted, such as kitchen waste. Another third is paper and cardboard which can also be composted, not just recycled! Composting takes these materials out of your rubbish that is collected, saving it from being landfilled or burnt, which can cause pollution to air, land and water.

Composting also cuts down the need to buy peat based products. Most commercial compost comes from peat bogs, a threatened natural habitat with rare plants and animals. It's a crying shame to use this, when our home-made compost is just as good!

The best news is  
composting is easy  
**AND it's free!**

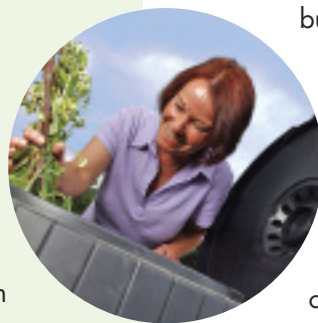
## How do I start?

You will need a good mix of **browns**, carbon rich, drier materials such as paper, cardboard, leaves, woody stems and straw and **greens**, nitrogen rich, wetter materials such as fruit and veg, grass cuttings, weeds and flowers for the compost to thrive. The success of your compost will also be dependent on the environment you provide for the micro-organisms (bacteria, fungi and worms) that help these two types of materials rot down.

### They will need four main things:

- Air** They will need oxygen for aerobic decomposition
- Water** Essential for them to live
- Shelter** To protect from the elements and provide a home for them
- Warmth** The warmer they are, the more they will feed and reproduce

You can make your compost in a heap, a bin or a box. Most people have a bin or a box as it keeps the pile tidy and helps to keep the heat inside (which assists the composting process). But you don't need to use a bin just pile up your kitchen and garden waste into a heap, cover with something waterproof and let nature do the rest!



## Then what?

**Step 1:** Put your container on soil with either broken paving slabs or chicken wire mesh underneath. Start filling with both greens and browns to get a good mixture of both wet and dry materials.

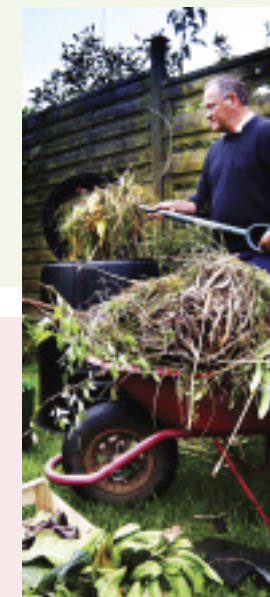
**Step 2:** Keep adding to the container until it's full. Composting works best in higher temperatures so if you can add larger amounts, rather than a little at a time, you will be helping to increase the temperature inside the compost. The more you add, the quicker it will work – but don't worry, you can still make perfect compost if you only add a little at a time. For best results always give your compost a stir when you add materials to turn the mixture and get air into it as this helps the composting process.

**Step 3:** Compost can be made in six to eight weeks, or it can take a year or more. In general, the more effort you put in, the quicker you will get compost.

**Step 4:** When the ingredients you have put in your container have turned into a dark crumbly soil the composting process is complete. It is then best left for a month or two to 'mature' before it is used. You can now use this for the garden, potted plants, allotments and window boxes etc. Any unrotted stuff you have, put back in the bin to start the next batch off. Keen composters will often have two bins on the go at once, one to put the fresh waste into and one to hold ripening compost.

## Do compost

- ✓ **Kitchen Waste** – Such as fruit skins and vegetable peelings, tea bags, coffee grounds and egg shells
- ✓ **Garden Waste** – Grass cuttings (but not too much at a time), hedge clippings, prunings, old plants, flowers and weeds
- ✓ **Paper and Cardboard** – Crumpled or shredded paper and card, including cardboard tubes and egg boxes. Try to avoid heavily coloured paper
- ✓ **Autumn Leaves** – In small amounts. Otherwise put them in black bin bags as they rot down to make a great mulch
- ✓ **Wood Ash** (but not coal)
- ✓ **Human Hair and Animal Hair**
- ✓ **Old pure wool jumpers and natural fabrics**
- ✓ **Sawdust and bedding and manure from vegetarian pets** (such as rabbits)



## Don't compost

- ✗ **Cooked food, meat and fish**
- ✗ **Droppings from meat eating animals**
- ✗ **Nappies**
- ✗ **Coal ash and soot**
- ✗ **Magazines and heavily inked cardboard** – recycle these
- ✗ **Plants infected with club root, white rot, blight or other persistent diseases**
- ✗ **The roots of persistent weeds**
- ✗ **Synthetic fabrics**
- ✗ **Glass, plastic, metal** – these should be recycled separately