



# Carbonbusting: compost

**Organic matter sent to land fill can be a major producer of methane – a powerful greenhouse gas, which is up to 23 times more potent than CO<sub>2</sub> because of its ability to trap heat in the atmosphere. Methane is produced when organic matter is squashed in with other waste, preventing it from having access to sufficient oxygen. As a result it breaks down anaerobically, The more of our organic household waste we can compost, the better.**

## TAKE ACTION

### Home Composting

On average, at least 30% of your household bin could be composted, taking 12-18 months to turn from your old vegetable peelings and egg boxes into nutrient rich compost for your plants.

#### Setting up your bin

Site your bin on a level, well-drained spot. Ideally it should be near enough to your house so its easy to remember to use it! You can use a plastic compost bin, which prevents nutrients washing away, but old pallets, or even just piling it in a heap are fine too.

#### Getting the mix right

You need a 50/50 mix of “greens” (which rot quickly, provide nitrogen and give moisture) to “browns” (which provide fibre, carbon and maintain air pockets to prevent methane production.)

“Greens” include: grass cuttings (in moderation), tea bags, veg peelings, nettles, coffee grounds, young annual weeds, nettles and rhubarb leaves.

“Browns” include: cardboard, egg shells, paper, garden prunings, straw, wood, feathers, wood ashes, tumble drier lint, paper towels and old natural fibre clothes cut into small pieces.

The following are not suitable for composting: cooked food waste, coal ash or diseased plants. Try and stir your compost occasionally to aerate it, and one year on, hey presto... compost!

#### Uses

You can use compost in lots of ways – spread it straight onto soil as a mulch; dig it into the ground when you are planting things; mix it with shop bought compost for containers. Using compost helps improve your soil nutrients and structure, which should in turn reduce the need for chemicals

#### Troubleshooting

Too many greens results in sludgy compost. Break up with a fork to aerate and mix in lots of brown material. Too many browns and nothing happens. Avoid putting in lots of leaves which don't generate enough heat to compost well. To solve, mix in more greens, and if dry, water.

Another way to reduce methane production - Meat free Mondays

Landfill isn't the only source of methane we are responsible for.... 37% of human created methane comes from the livestock sector, especially cows and sheep. (the average cow expels 200g of methane each day.) Why not have a meat free day each week?

## HELP AVAILABLE TO YOU

Garden Organic run a master composter scheme – check out the website to find a volunteer master composter in your area, or to find out more about training to become one. <https://www.gardenorganic.org.uk/master-composter-schemes>



## YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED

### Should I compost paper?

Paper is a good “brown” ingredient in compost, and composting your (shredded) confidential waste is a great way to tackle ID fraud. However, its better to keep good quality paper in the recycling loop rather than composting it.

### Can I compost wood chip cat litter?

It is not advisable to put this in your compost as its unlikely that your compost will reach sufficient enough temperatures to kill pathogens. Although in theory it might be OK to put it into the council garden waste collection, which reaches higher temperatures when it rots, in practice this still may not be enough to kill all pathogens. Also, its unlikely it would be accepted for collection as crew couldn't be sure how 'clean' it was.

### Compostable bags don't seem to break down readily in my compost bin, can I put them into the council garden waste collections?

The 'compostable' bags are really designed to go into the central compost facilities, where they break down easily in the higher temperatures. However, sadly you can't put it out for collection because the crews don't have time to check whether each plastic bag is compostable or not. The only way to currently deal with them is to keep putting it back onto the domestic compost heap until it eventually disappears.

### If I can't put lots of leaves on my compost heap, what can I do with them?

If you have lots of leaves you can process these separately into leaf mould – just bag them up in black plastic sacks, punch a few holes into the bags with a garden fork, and tuck them out of the way for a year or two. The leaves will rot down into lovely brown crumbly leafmould which can be used in the same way as compost.

## MYTH BUSTING

### I don't have room for a compost heap so I can't compost at home.

“Wormeries” are a quick and easy way of composting waste, taking up far less space than a traditional compost heap. Alternatively why not investigate the Bokashi bucket system for composting which uses an anaerobic process and can be carried out in your kitchen.

Both can be purchased from retailers such as Wiggly Wigglers. [www.wigglywigglers.co.uk](http://www.wigglywigglers.co.uk)

Alternatively you can make your own wormery at the fraction of the price of a shop bought model.

### Its not safe to add coloured cardboard and paper to compost heaps because of the ink

It is quite safe to include cardboard such as cereal packets etc. The inks used these days no longer contain the harmful heavy metals that used to be a problem. Due to economic reasons the industry has converted to vegetable-based inks. The only material we do not recommend in an organic garden is the fire-proof cardboard, as this does contain certain pollutants.

### I don't want a compost bin in my garden because it will attract rats

There are likely to be rats in the area anyway, but your compost bin shouldn't attract rats as long as you don't put cooked food in. Rats are also deterred by frequent human activity around your bin, so make sure you visit it regularly, and maybe move things around near it.

## FIND OUT MORE

[www.homecomposting.org.uk/](http://www.homecomposting.org.uk/) for tips

[www.gardenorganic.org.uk/master-composter-schemes](http://www.gardenorganic.org.uk/master-composter-schemes) for more on the Master Composter Scheme

[www.recyclenow.com/compost](http://www.recyclenow.com/compost)

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