

FACT SHEET

– Home Composting



 (02) 4677 1100
 wollondilly.nsw.gov.au



Compost heaps are a great way to reuse lawn clippings and prunings, and when mixed with vegetable scraps and other organics can make a nutrient rich potting mix and mulch that can be used around your garden.

The 'Easy Guide to Home Composting' will assist you in setting up your own compost heap, and have you producing nutrient rich compost in no time.

For details on how to make your own compost heap, download the 'Easy Guide to Composting' at the bottom of this page.

Compost bins are available through Wollondilly Shire Council for \$41.75 (2015/16) and can be purchased from the front counter of Councils Administration Building 62-64 Menangle Street Picton. Worm Farms can be purchased for \$74.50.

[Easy Guide to Composting](#)

[Easy Guide to Mulch](#)

[Easy Guide to Worm Farming](#)

[Easy Guide to Natural Cleaning](#)

Contact:

Waste Education Officer: 4677 1100

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The easy compost fix-it guide As composting is a natural process, it doesn't take much to work out the problem. Some solutions are listed below.



Smelly compost?

If it gets too wet or if there is not enough air in the heap your compost can smell. A common cause is having too much food and not enough dry ingredients in your compost.

Fix it

- ✓ Fork in dry leaves or garden mulch.
- ✓ Add garden lime, dolomite or woodfire ash to the heap to reduce acidity.
- ✓ Turn the compost to add air.



- ✓ Combine nitrogen-rich ingredients with sawdust or shredded newspaper before adding to the heap.
- ✓ Give your compost heap a 'floor' of planks to ensure good drainage.

Unwelcome visitors?

Ants, cockroaches, mice or rats can sometimes make your compost their home.



Fix it

- ✓ Always cover food with a layer of garden vegetation or soil – then cover heap with underfelt, hessian or polythene plastic sheet.



- ✓ Turn the compost to discourage ants and cockroaches.
- ✓ Fine wire under the compost bin or heap helps keep out mice and rats.
- ✓ Avoid placing dairy products, meat and seafood in the compost.



Compost slow to mature?

A slow composting system can mean that the compost is not hot enough, or there may not be enough air or water.

Fix it

- ✓ Add nitrogen-rich material, such as kitchen scraps or green garden vegetation.
- ✓ Turn the heap and add water.
- ✓ Cover the compost with insulating material in winter if it gets too cold.



Compost bins and worm farms are available from some local councils.

For more information visit

www.environment.nsw.gov.au
www.livingthing.net.au

Contact

DECC Environment Line
131 555

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Why compost?

Compost is natural and inexpensive and is good for the environment. By turning food scraps and garden vegetation into compost you can:

- **improve** soil quality and garden vitality
- **conserve** water
- **recycle** valuable nutrients and reduce the use of artificial fertilisers
- **prevent** greenhouse gas emissions and landfill impacts from wasted food and garden vegetation.



Did you know?

- About half of what we throw into the garbage bin is food and garden vegetation.
- These materials can be used to make compost to benefit your garden.



4 easy steps to great compost

1 Choose the site

Look for a site with good drainage and summer shade.



2 Compost ingredients

You will need:

- nitrogen rich kitchen scraps such as fruit and vegetable peelings and green garden vegetation such as fresh grass clippings, green leaves, weeds and manure
- carbon-rich brown garden vegetation such as dry leaves, woody twigs, paper and straw
- some water
- some soil or completed compost to introduce composting micro-organisms.



Hints

- ✓ Use the lawn mower to chop up coarse garden prunings.
- ✓ Keep a bucket with a well-sealed lid in the kitchen to collect food scraps.



3 Create layers

To make compost, start with a thick layer (15cm) of twigs or coarse mulch at the base for drainage. Then follow the A,B,C steps and repeat to build a heap layer upon layer.

- A.** Thin layer of kitchen scraps and green garden vegetation
- B.** Cover with a layer of brown garden vegetation covering all kitchen scraps
- C.** Moisten well

Then repeat steps ABC to build a heap layer upon layer.



Hint Sprinkling soil or finished compost on top of food scraps will make a richer compost and help reduce odours.

4 Maintaining your compost

Add air to the compost so it doesn't smell by turning it with a garden fork weekly or by placing garden stakes or pipes through the heap to allow air in.

Hint Cover your heap so that it is just moist, not wet. If it is wet or saturated mix more dry brown material through it and turn.

Compost problems? Turn over for the Easy Compost Fix-it Guide >>

How to use compost

Use compost as:

- seed-raising mix
- fertiliser
- mulch (apply up to twice a year on natives).



What you can compost

Fruit and vegetable peelings, newspapers, grass clippings, weeds, tea leaves, coffee grounds, egg shells, old potting mix, dead flowers, human and animal hair.

Hint Avoid placing meat or dairy products in your compost until you are confident and experienced in making compost.



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Some tips for making mulch

Collar your mulch

When using woody mulch around trees and plants, leave some space (a 'collar') between the bark or stem and the mulch. This will prevent creating conditions that may encourage disease.



Weed free mulch

Avoid using weeds, seeding plants and certain leaves in your mulch mix. (Eucalyptus and Camphor Laurel leaves contain substances that inhibit plant growth for 3-4 weeks when fresh. These can be composted.)



Killer mulch

Avoid making mulch with organic materials that have been exposed to weed killer or pesticides as the mulch may harm your plants or soil.



Mature mulch

Mulching with fresh woody material such as wood chips and bark can rob the soil of nitrogen. Let mulches mature for a few weeks before applying to plants. Try mixing one part of nitrogen-rich material like compost, worm castings or animal manures (eg cows or chickens) to ten parts mulch.

Go grasscycling!

The cheapest and easiest way to recycle your lawn clippings is to leave them on the lawn after mowing. Here are a few tips for successful grasscycling:

- ✓ Mow your lawn when it's dry to prevent clumping.
- ✓ Make sure the lawnmower blades are sharp.
- ✓ Set the mower height to 5–6 cm.
- ✓ Try to remove only the top third of the grass blades each time you mow.



- ✓ Hire or borrow a mulch mower. A mulch mower does a better job because the grass is cut finer. A regular mower can also work well, just remove the catcher while mowing.

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The marvel of mulch

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What is mulch?

Mulch is organic material that covers the soil to stop weed growth and promote healthy gardens.

It retains nutrients and moisture in the soil and increases biological activity in the soil – especially worms and good microbes.



Many benefits of mulch

- ✓ Helps keep the weeds down.
- ✓ Reduces soil erosion and soil compaction around plants.
- ✓ Keeps roots cool in summer and warm in winter and helps retain moisture.
- ✓ Reduces the need for chemical sprays and fertilisers.
- ✓ Less watering of your garden.
- ✓ It provides nutrients.

You can use mulch around plants, paths and children's play areas.



4 easy ways to make mulch

1 Using clippings

Lawn clippings are a natural garden wonder, so make the most of your clippings by:

- Leaving them on the lawn when you mow, feeding the lawn and making it healthier.
- Mulching around annual flower and vegetable plants.

Note: leave space between the bark or stem and mulch.



2 Using garden prunings

It's easy to turn garden prunings into mulch, and here's how:

- Arrange twigs, thin branches and leafy material in a long row and use the lawn mower to shred them.
- For larger branches, borrow or hire a small shredder.



3 Using compost

Composting your food scraps and garden vegetation can create a free source of nutrients for seedlings, plants, shrubs and trees. The nutrients in compost are readily available to your plants and soil. Call 131 555 to get your Easy Composting guide or visit www.livingthing.net.au



4 Using bought mulches

Many different types of mulches can be bought either in bags or in bulk. Straw, hay, wood and bark chips can be easily purchased.

Wood chip mulches are often used as an attractive feature for garden paths and to soften falls under children's play equipment.



Mulch can be made from common organic items from your garden and kitchen.

Leaves are a decorative free mulch which provide fibrous organic material to the soil.



Grass clippings contain nitrogen and potash and rot down quickly. Great for seedlings!

Seaweed is seed free, doesn't transfer plant diseases, looks good and is high in minerals and potash.

Shredded garden prunings look great around larger plants and shrubs.

Straw can be used as mulch around vegetable plants and seedlings.

Newspaper that can't go in the recycling bin can be used as mulch.



Compost is an all-round wonder for the garden. It decays quickly as a mulch and provides nutrients and trace elements to plants and soil.

Wood chips are often used as mulch in landscaping.

Try ground cover plants as a **living mulch**. Herbs such as Corsican Mint (*Mentha requenii*), Wild Thyme (*Thymus serpyllum*) or Kidney Weed (*Dichondra repens*) make great ground covers.



Hint Try to increase the variety of mulches you use on your gardens.

Turn over for some great mulch-making tips >>

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The easy worm farm fix-it guide

Worm farms are easy to look after – you will only need to spend a few hours maintaining your worms. But sometimes there can be problems. Some common problems and their solutions are listed here.

My worm farm smells



Your worms may be overfed or too wet.

Fix it

- ✓ Feed your worms slowly and gradually build up the quantity.
- ✓ Make sure your worm farm is well-drained or your worms may drown.



Unwelcome visitors?

Ants or cockroaches may be a bit of a nuisance but don't worry – they won't harm your worms.

Fix it

- ✓ Keep a lid on your worm farm or underfelt cover over the food scraps.
- ✓ If your worm farm sits on legs, place each leg in a bowl of water.



Going on holidays?
Feed moist paper.

My worms won't multiply

Worms need the right conditions in order to breed. Keep them cool (the ideal temperature is 18-25°C); moist but not too wet; away from direct light; and feed them foods that do not cause acidic conditions (fruits, grains and sugary foods can be acid-forming).



Fix it

- ✓ Keep your worm farm out of direct sunlight.
- ✓ Keep it covered and well drained.
- ✓ Add a sprinkling of wood ash, dolomite or lime every few weeks to prevent the worm farm from becoming too acidic.

Vinegar flies?
Add lime.
Too acidic?
Add paper.

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Why have a worm farm?

- Worms turn your food leftovers into rich soil-like 'castings' which are great for feeding to house plants, adding to seedling mixes and potting soils or top-dressing around plants.
- The liquid produced by your worm farm is full of nutrients – dilute and use it on your pot plants.
- Worm farms can be kept outside, inside, on the balcony or in the garage and they are ideal for units.



4 easy steps to successful worm farming

1 Choose the site

Pick a well-shaded spot so that your worms don't get too hot.



2 Collect worm food

Worms like to eat vegetable and fruit peelings, pulp from the juicer, tea bags, crushed egg shells, bread and small amounts of soiled paper and cardboard (such as shredded egg cartons).



Smaller scraps are easier and quicker to digest so blend your scraps with water before feeding your worms.

Worms' least favourite foods are dairy products, butter and cheese, meat, fish, fat and bones, very oily foods and citrus, onion and garlic.



Hint Make sure your worm farm is:

- ✓ **Moist** – worms breathe through their skins which need to be kept moist.
- ✓ **Well-drained** – worms can drown if the worm farm gets too wet.
- ✓ **Covered** – worms don't like direct light and covering your worm farm will also discourage flies and other pests.
- ✓ **Not acidic** – avoid feeding your worms acidic foods like citrus, onion and garlic.



3 Make a worm farm or bed

If you don't want to buy a worm farm you can build one with boxes or make a worm bed in your garden.

Worm farms are typically 30 cm deep, 60 cm wide and 90 cm long, have holes in the base to allow air in, have good drainage and are covered with hessian or underfelt. A base or tray underneath will provide good drainage and catch liquid that you can use on your garden.



Make some bedding from a combination of finished compost, leaves and soggy paper. The bedding should be torn or shredded to allow the worms to move easily. Make the bedding layer 10–15 cm deep.

Now add between one and two thousand worms. You can buy worms directly from commercial worm growers or through your local nursery. Spread the worms out gently on the surface and allow them to burrow down.

Start adding your kitchen scraps regularly and in small amounts by placing them in the box and covering them with bedding material or a handful of soil or compost.

Only add more food once most of the worms' previous meal has been eaten.

4 Harvest worms

Move the worm castings/compost (vermicompost) all to one side of the worm farm and add fresh bedding to the empty side. The worms will migrate to the fresh bedding in a few days so that the valuable worm castings can be taken out and used.



Problems with your worm farm? Turn over for the easy worm farm fix-it guide >>

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Safe and effective cleaning ideas

Clean your home safely

The Easy guide to natural cleaning



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Natural cleaning or 'green cleaning' is a way to clean your home with fewer cleaning products and safer alternatives – producing less waste and reducing the need for harmful chemicals.

Most homes contain many more household cleaners than we really need. These cleaners create packaging waste that is disposed in landfill and the chemicals in the cleaning products can damage human health and the environment.

But we don't need to use all these cleaning products to have a clean house. To clean well, cheaply and safely throughout the home, all you need are the following basic ingredients (plus a little elbow grease).



your natural cleaning kit

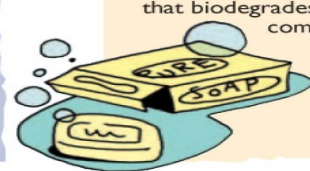
All these ingredients can be bought inexpensively from your local supermarket.

Bicarbonate of Soda (Baking Soda) cleans, deodorises, softens water and is a good scouring powder. Keep in a flour shaker to keep it dry.



White vinegar cuts grease and is a deodoriser and mild disinfectant. Mix half and half with water and store in a spray bottle.

Pure Soap is a general purpose cleaner that biodegrades completely.



Lemon juice is a mild bleach, a deodorant and a cleaning agent.



Washing Soda cuts grease and removes stains.



Borax is a naturally occurring mineral salt. It cleans, deodorises, bleaches and disinfects. Borax is also used to control pests such as ants and cockroaches.



how to green clean

There are just **THREE** things to remember to green clean.

REDUCE ♦ BE SMART ♦ THINK SAFE

REDUCE the use of household cleaners by buying less, using less and looking for natural, safer alternatives.

BE SMART when you shop, read the label to avoid buying the more toxic product and buy only what you need.

THINK SAFE when handling and storing cleaners and dispose of them legally and safely.

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your recipes 'They're safe, smell good and really work.'

All-purpose cleaner

Warm water mixed with pure soap or white vinegar is a cheap and easy general cleaner for throughout the home.



In the bathroom

TOILET CLEANER Make a paste from borax and lemon juice for cleaning non-septic toilet bowls.

CERAMIC CLEANER Clean tiles, sinks, toilets and baths with bicarbonate of soda using a damp cloth.

MIRROR CLEANER Apply eucalyptus oil with a wad of newspaper to prevent mirrors from fogging.



In the kitchen

SURFACE CLEANER Use bicarbonate of soda on a damp cloth to clean benchtops, sinks, windows and your refrigerator or freezer surfaces.

DISHWASHING DETERGENT Use pure soap to wash dishes and add white vinegar to the rinse water to give glasses an extra shine.

OVEN CLEANER Avoid caustic oven cleaners. Wipe the oven down while still warm with a soapy cloth.

In the living room

CARPET CLEANER Sprinkle bicarbonate of soda on carpet before vacuuming to deodorise. It's also a great stain remover. Just vacuum or brush up when dry.

WINDOW CLEANER Add half a cup of vinegar to a litre of warm water for an effective window cleaner. Wash the window first with warm soapy water if especially dirty. Use crumpled newspaper moistened with vinegar to get a beautiful sheen.



In the laundry

BLEACH Use one cup of lemon juice in a half bucket of water and soak overnight, or substitute half a cup of borax per washload to whiten whites and brighten colours.

STAIN REMOVER Use eucalyptus oil to remove stains before washing. Simply apply a few drops and let it evaporate.

LAUNDRY DETERGENT To make a cheap, environmentally friendly and safe laundry detergent, mix one third of a cake of pure soap (grated) with one third of a cup washing soda. Dissolve in hot water in a bucket and top up with water. The mixture will set to a soft gel. Use 2-3 cups per wash.

In the car

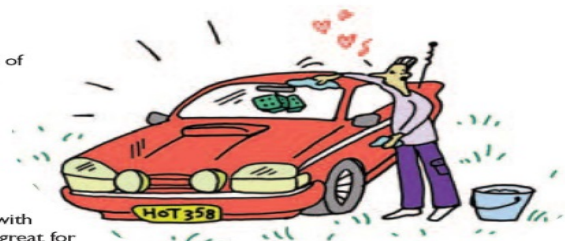
BATTERY CLEANER Clean battery terminals with a mixture of 2 teaspoons of bicarbonate of soda with 1 litre of water and apply generously. Vaseline smeared around the base of the terminals will prevent further build up.

POLISH Give your car a normal wash. Allow it to dry, then sprinkle cornflour over the duco. Polish it in and off to give that extra sheen.

CHROME POLISH Use flour or bicarbonate of soda using a dry, clean cloth

TAR REMOVER Moisten a cloth with eucalyptus oil and rub clean.

SOME MORE HINTS Get rid of that new car smell by wiping vinyl surfaces with a strong solution of vinegar, and air well. A soft cloth moistened with vinegar is great for cleaning windscreens and windows. An open container of bicarbonate of soda absorbs odours, especially doggy and stale cigarette smells. And don't forget to wash your car on the lawn!



There are many good publications on green cleaning and natural alternatives to chemical cleaners. Try your local library, the Australian Consumers Association, your local environment centre or the Department of Environment and Conservation (NSW) on 131 555



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