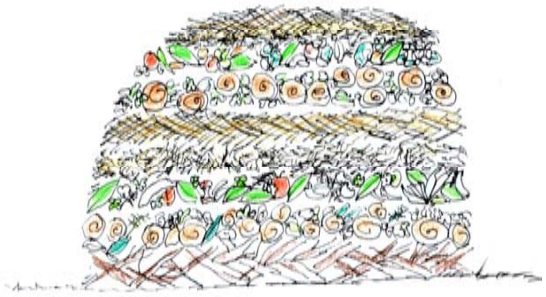
Garden Africa

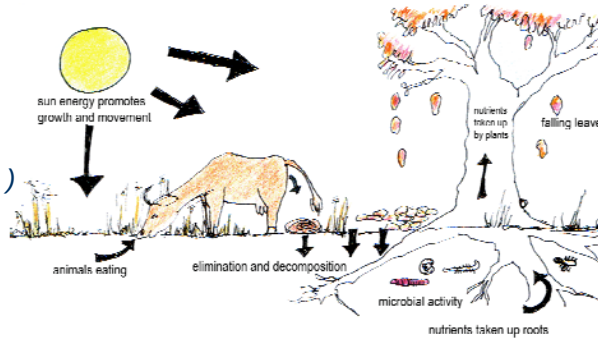
Creating Your own Compost



By feeding your compost with a balanced diet, as though it were a living creature, it will produce great humus for your garden.

Illustrations by:

earthworm productions



What is compost?

From the SOIL leaflet, you'll remember the importance of increasing the humus content of your topsoil.

Composting intensifies the process that is already taking place in your topsoil. By adding waste from your garden, kitchen and animals to your compost heap, you can speed up this process.

Composting is a way of ensuring that all the energy from you, your animals and your garden is recycled. Returning this to the garden will increase soil fertility.

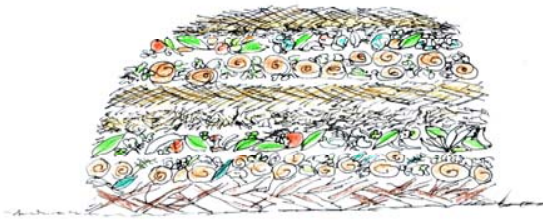
By feeding your compost with a balanced diet, as though it were a living creature, it will produce great humus for your garden.

How can I get started?

Aerobic compost is where the compost is created by micro-organisms that use oxygen in the process of decomposition. Aerobic compost is quick to decompose and destroys most of the weed seeds and plant diseases, if it is made correctly.

A compost heap should be no smaller than 2 cubic metres to sustain the heat that it needs to 'cook'.

Remember to plant comfrey, yarrow, tansy, nettles close by so that you can add them to get the nutrient balance. These are your 'green' manures that can be added to the compost heap to speed up decomposition.



What can I add to my compost?

Straw / Grass cuttings & weeds / Urine / Kitchen scraps / Wood ash / Leaves / shredded paper / animal manures / compost activators (green manure)

Your compost will ideally have 20-30 times more carbon than nitrogen.

Carbon: Leaf materials from the garden, straw, sawdust, shredded paper, wood ash, kitchen waste.

Nitrogen: Manure / nettles / comfrey / urine / kitchen waste

Where you have a lot of grass and other garden waste, add **green composters** & manure to get that balance.

Examples of Compost Activators / Green Manure Plants / Soil Improvers
(N = Nitrogen P= Phosphorous)

Alfalfa / Lucerne (N),
Banana skins,
Bean (N),
Buckwheat,
Caraway – loosens soil, Chamomile,
Comfrey (N,P), Clover (N),
Dandelion,
Elder,
Flax/Linseed,
Golden Rod,
Hyssop – fights bacterial disease,
Lovage, Lupin (N,P),
Mustard (N),
Nettle (N),
Oak (Acid Mulch), Oats,
Pine (Acid Mulch),
Salad Burnet, Soya bean,
Sunflower,
Tansy, Thistle,
Valerian (P),
Yarrow

10 simple steps to making compost

1. Lay down a 20cm layer of course materials (straw) at the base of the heap to allow for aeration and drainage. The compost heap should always be made on the ground so that micro-organisms & worms can move into it;
2. Lay down a 10cm layer of nitrogen: Manure / nettles / comfrey / urine / kitchen waste
3. Lay down 30cm layer of Carbon: Leaf materials from the garden, straw, sawdust, shredded paper, wood ash, kitchen waste.
4. **Repeat steps 2-3 - spraying water over each layer as you go until it is damp.** Do not saturate the compost heap as this will prevent it from heating;
5. Once the compost heap is completed it must be covered with a layer of straw to act as a mulch and loosely covered with black plastic to keep existing moisture;
6. The heap will heat rapidly over the first 3 days, insert a metal pole into the heap and when you pull it out the pole should be hot indicating that the heap is doing its thing. This also draws air into the heap;
7. The heap will continue to get really hot for the first 6 days. After the 6th day it will start cooling and
8. By the 10th day it should be ready for turning;
9. When turning the heap use a fork and mix all the layers together (except the bottom materials placed for drainage purposes) and add more water if it is needed. Repeat this process until the heap is ready.
10. You compost will be ready to use when it's black and crumbly & smells like sweet soil.

Plugs of red wrigglers and other earthworms can be added to the heap when it starts cooling down.

Do's and Don'ts

Avoid Adding:

Bones, sticks & twigs, citrus & potato peels
Eucalyptus (gum) leaves in any form of compost.

Rotten cooked food – which doesn't decompose properly

Seeded weeds – ie: blackjacks
Dog and cat manure – which pass on diseases.

Do: Make a special heap for hard wood leaves (ie: oak, pine) which will take up to a year but provide great leaf mould, which is a good mulch.
Turn regularly – the more the better

Top Tip: Waste nothing. Even the twigs and branches that you cannot add to your heap can be used as supports for beans and other climbers.