



Compost first aid

We've put together a selection of common composting problems and offered some solutions to help you keep your compost heap in tip-top condition!

My compost is too dry

The end product should be quite moist. Do not expect the same consistency of material that you might find in a bag of general purpose compost purchased from a garden centre.

If the compost is too dry, then add water, but not too much or the temperature in the bin will fall and the composting process will slow down.

My compost is too wet

To dry out compost that is too wet, add dry material such as shredded paper to the bin.

This could also be caused by rain getting into your compost bin. Try covering it up and pop a brick on top if the cover blows away.

My compost has gone slimy/mushy

Most likely, all the fruit and vegetable peelings that have been added to your bin have not been properly balanced out with fibrous materials. Try adding paper towels, torn up cardboard boxes, cardboard egg boxes, toilet roll centres and scrunched up paper to restore the balance.

Also too many grass clippings can make your compost slimy. If you get a lot of grass clippings you can always put them in your brown bin instead of your compost bin.

My compost bin stinks!

There could be several reasons for this: firstly are you using waste from animal bedding? Manure from herbivores (e.g. horse manure) is fine in small amounts but too much will cause a stink. Remember never to use cat litter or dog mess in your compost as these can carry diseases. Secondly you could be using too much "green" waste such as grass clippings.

To solve the problem of a stinky compost bin try restoring the balance of your bin by adding more "brown" waste such as cardboard, paper, straw or prunings. It could also be that there is not enough air in your compost. The bacteria that cause the smell will thrive in airless conditions so try turning the compost to get more air into it.

Nothing seems to be happening - what can I do?

After approximately twelve months, there should be some signs of dark brown/black compost developing at the very bottom of the bin. If your compost seems to have stalled there are a number of things you can try to kick start the process again.

Firstly the temperature in the bin may have dropped. Try moving your bin to a site where it will get quite a bit of sun. You can also try covering it with something like an old piece of carpet or some cardboard to insulate it. Secondly try giving it a good mix to make sure everything is incorporated and give the micro organisms that run the composting process plenty of air. Don't forget it will take longer for materials to compost during the colder months.

If this doesn't solve the problem it may be that the mix of materials you are trying to compost is not quite right. You should aim for a 50/50 mix of "green" materials such as grass clippings, and young sappy plants, and "brown" materials such as straw, cardboard, paper and other dry, fibrous materials. Also check whether your compost is too wet or too dry - it should be about as wet as a wrung out sponge.

If all fails urine has been traditionally used as a compost activator! Alternatively you could try steeping some nettles in water and adding this to the heap.

My compost bin is attracting flies

This problem usually arises when food waste is left on top of the compost pile. Quite often this will attract fruit flies in particular. There are two methods of control, the first being to attach one of the yellow greenhouse flytraps to the underside of the compost bin lid, or position it close to the outside of the compost bin. Alternatively, sprinkle a layer of soil on top of any fruit waste that is placed in the compost bin.

There are potatoes growing in the compost bin from the peelings

This is a common occurrence and won't have a detrimental effect on your compost, unless the potatoes have blight and then there is a risk of transferring the blight through your compost.

I have a problem that is not answered here

We have tried to cover the most common composting problems here but if you have a problem that is not answered here you could try asking the staff at your local nursery or garden centre for advice. Alternatively visit the home composting website at http://www.recyclenow.com/home_composting which has lots of information about home composting and a helpline for people who get stuck.

Happy Composting!!