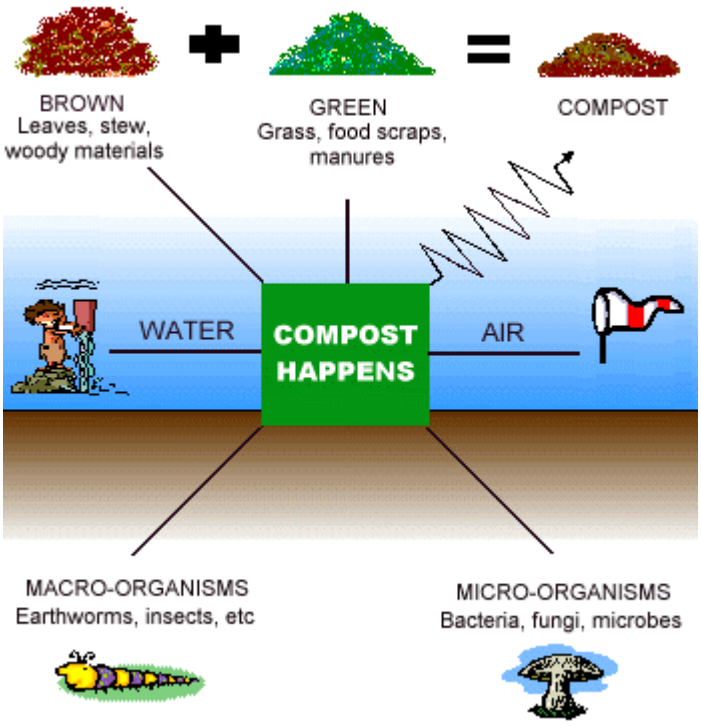
Home Composting

How composting works

Compost is formed as a result of the natural breakdown of organic matter, such as food or plants. This breakdown occurs when the organic matter is exposed to elements such as oxygen, bacteria, fungi and insects. These help to decompose the organic matter into natural topsoil, which you can then use to improve the soil structure and fertilise your garden.



Why Compost?

1. Home composting helps to divert biodegradable waste away from landfill – methane emissions from landfill account for 40% of all UK methane emissions

2. It's cheap – about 5 times cheaper than collection and treatment of organic waste by your Council

3. Saves you money by providing you with a natural soil conditioner

4. Composting is one of the easiest and cheapest ways of recycling and is something that most of us can do in our own back garden.

Convert this:



To this:



Your compost bin

To start home composting, you will need a compost bin. You can either make one yourself from wooden boxes or pallets or you can buy a plastic bin via Essex County Council (www.recycleforessex.co.uk).





What you can compost



As a rule of thumb, anything which was once living can be composted. However, you should **avoid putting cooked food, meat and dairy products** in the compost bin, as these types of foods need different treatment to decompose and may attract vermin.

You need a mix of "**green**" and "**brown**" materials:

Greens (nitrogen based):

Grass Cuttings
Dead Flowers and end of year, Annual bedding plants
Weeds (but not persistent ones, eg dandelions)
Raw Fruit (apple cores and all fruit peel)
Vegetable scraps (raw potato and vegetable peelings, outer cabbage leaves, lettuce leaves and other salad)
Tea Bags
Coffee Grounds
Crushed egg shells

Browns (carbon based):

Ripped Cardboard & Paper
Twigs, cuttings and prunings (hedge, shrub, tree and hardwood plants)
Leaves (in small quantities)

How to Compost

1. Locate your composter on bare soil, preferably somewhere in your garden that is easily accessible all year round and in a sunny position to allow the heap to warm up and aid decomposition.

2. You should mix your Green and Brown materials evenly when composting. Greens are soft, wet materials like grass cuttings, vegetables and fruit scraps. Browns are harder, dryer materials like hedge trimmings and strips of cardboard.

3. When composting you should put a lot of materials in all at once. Chop large items into smaller pieces to help with the process. Try to ensure that your compost is moist but not wet – when squeezed in your hand, a few drops of water should be produced. Add water if it is too dry; cover and add dry material if too wet.

4. If you wish, add compost accelerator (young nettles are an excellent natural accelerator) to help speed up the composting process.

5. Keep adding materials, remembering to agitate the contents every couple of weeks throughout spring and summer to keep air flowing through.

6. Your compost is ready when it is dark in colour and smells like earth. This can take from 6 to 18 months, depending on the materials used and the time of the year.