Composting

A FACTSHEET FOR COMPOSTING AT HOME

Why compost

- **Composting is a great way to recycle your organic waste**
- **Using compost on your garden can help reduce the amount of weeding, water and artificial fertilisers your garden requires**
- **Composting is a fun way to get children involved in the garden and in recycling**
- **Compost will help to improve the quality of your soil**
- **Composting helps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions which organic waste produces when placed in landfill**

Principles of composting - ADAM

Aliveness: Compost is a living system. It is full of microorganisms, fungi, worms and other creatures; they are all important for creating healthy soil.

Diversity: Diversity is an important feature of all natural systems and also in compost. Compost needs a range of materials to achieve a good balance of nutrients.

Air: Compost needs air to break down properly as the good bacteria in the compost are aerobic. Airflow will also prevent your compost from smelling bad.

Moisture: All living things need water. Your compost should be kept moist.

Building Compost

1. Choose a shady site with good drainage
2. Decide on a container—commercially produced bin or build-it-yourself pile
3. Start with a base of thick mulch or twigs to ensure good drainage—around 15cm
4. Next add daily layers of "nitrogen rich" ingredients
5. Cover these with "carbon rich" ingredients
6. Moisten and cover with hessian to keep pests out and water in
7. Keep adding nitrogen and carbon layers until the container is full
8. Compost is ready when it is dark and crumbly

Using compost

Composting is a process that uses naturally occurring microbes, worms and other organisms to break down organic matter into nutrient rich humus. Compost has a number of applications in the garden:

- Mix with potting mix and use in potted plants
- Spread as mulch around plants
- Dig into soil, garden beds or vegetable garden to increase nutrient levels and microbial action

What can go into your compost?

Nitrogen-rich materials

All fruit and vegetable scraps, eggshells, green grass and leaves, flowers, seaweed, bread, pasta and rice (in small amounts) manure (chicken, cow and horse), hair (animal, human and feathers)

Carbon-rich material

Garden materials such as dried grass clippings, hay, fallen leaves and twigs, tea leaves and coffee grounds, vacuum dust, paper and cardboard

Things to avoid

Meat (and other proteins such as tofu), dairy products (tiny amounts are okay), large volumes of carbohydrates, oils and pet faeces.

Trouble shooting

My compost is too dry	• Lightly water it and/or add some fruit and vegetable scraps
My compost is too wet	• Improve the drainage and try adding some dry materials such as newspaper to soak up the excess water
My compost smells; Sometimes compost	• Fork in dry leaves, straw or hay.

will smell if there is not enough air, if it gets too wet or too acidic	• Add garden lime, dolomite or wood ash to reduce acidity • Turn the compost to add air • Combine nitrogen-rich ingredients with shredded newspaper and add to the compost heap • Ensure your compost heap has a well-drained floor
My compost is taking a long time to break down; This can mean it is not hot enough, or there may not be enough air or water	• Add nitrogen-rich material, such as kitchen scraps, green garden vegetation or cow manure • Turn the compost heap and add water – the compost should feel moist to touch, not soaking wet • Cover the compost with an insulating material, i.e. a sheet of hessian, in winter if it gets too cold
I have pests! On the odd occasion cockroaches, mice or rats may visit your compost heap	• Avoid placing dairy products, meat and seafood in the compost • Cover food with a layer of garden vegetation or sprinkle with lime. You can also then cover the compost heap with a sheet of hessian • Rat proof your bin by placing it on chicken wire that extends into the earth

Composting precautions

Compost is produced from natural materials and contains a variety of living organisms. On rare occasions, these organisms have been associated with illness and allergies in humans. For health reasons, it is important to:

- Wash your hands after handling compost
- Avoid handling compost in confined spaces
- Protect broken skin by wearing gloves
- Keep compost moist to prevent spores or bacteria becoming airborne

Did you know composting at home for just one year can save global warming gases equivalent to all the CO^2 your washing machine produces in three months?

For further information please contact Wyndham City Council Waste and Litter Education Officers on 9742 0777 or wastewise@wyndham.vic.gov.au