



# A GUIDE

# TO

# HOME

# COMPOSTING



Neath Port Talbot  
Castell-nedd Port Talbot  
County Borough Council / Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol



Cyngor Sir Caerfyrddin  
Carmarthenshire County Council



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# Introduction

**South West Wales Local Authorities are working together to promote home composting throughout the region. This simple guide will help you to find out more about composting.**

Home composting is the most environmentally friendly method of dealing with organic waste. Separating and composting kitchen scraps and garden waste, not only reduces the amount of household waste that is buried in landfill sites, but also benefits OUR pocket.

## INTERESTED - READ ON

Most kitchen and garden waste can be recycled back into the soil, via composting.

The composted organic material can be used to provide plant food and improve the quality of the soil. The tidiest and quickest way of composting is to use a compost bin.



# What is Composting?

**Composting is a natural process that converts organic waste into a valuable material for the garden. The process is divided into two stages:**



1. Bacteria and Fungi (the HEATERS), utilise the softer wastes as a source of food. A well-made heap should generate heat and reach 60° C - about the temperature of a hot cup of tea.
2. The heap will eventually cool down after 4-6 weeks and at this point the 'CHOMPERS' start consuming the tougher material. The 'CHOMPERS' are large invertebrates (e.g. worms, centipedes, beetles). A dark, rich, fibrous compost is then produced.

## WHY SHOULD WE COMPOST?

WE can benefit the environment and ourselves by composting!! So, what are the benefits?

- A reduction of waste going to landfill sites which in turn will reduce environmental landfill problems such as groundwater contamination and methane gas generation - that contributes to Global Warming.
- Financial savings - the final produce of home composting is a natural chemical free source of plant food, which will save on shopping for pre-packed compost and fertilisers.
- Most pre-packed compost contains peat, which when removed from peat bogs damages important wildlife sites.
- Improves the texture and the nutritional quality of the soil.

## What Should We Compost?



Put me in the  
compost bin!

### Kitchen Waste

Vegetable Peelings, Fruit scraps, Tea Bags/leaves, Coffee Grounds, Egg Shells (*crushed*)

### Garden Waste

Grass Cuttings, Hedge Clippings, Prunings (*non woody*), Old Plants, flowers, Autumn Leaves (*small quantities*)

### Others

Cardboard (*small quantity*), Cigarette ends, Cork (*small pieces*), Sawdust/Animal Bedding, Waste Paper (*e.g. cardboard tubes*), Wood ash



I can't be  
composted!

Books, Carpets & Underlay, Cat & Dog Faeces, Chemicals, Coal ash and soot, Cooked food (*e.g. meat, fish, bones, vegetables*)

Cork (*large pieces*), Diseased Plants (*e.g. club root*), Foil & food trays, Glass, Metals, Nappies (*disposable*), Plastic (*of any type*), Thick hedge trimmings, Pernicious weeds (*e.g. Japanese knotweed*)

String, Synthetic fabric, Wall paper strippings, Vacuum cleaner contents

## What Makes a Good Compost Heap?

**FOR A GOOD COMPOST HEAP YOU REQUIRE: SOFT GREEN MATERIAL (grass, manure) TO PROVIDE NITROGEN + A GOOD SUPPLY OF AIR + SOME MOISTURE + CHOMPERS (insects, worms etc) + MICRO-ORGANISMS (bacteria, Fungi etc) + HEAT!!! + TOUGHER MATERIAL (woody material) TO KEEP THE STRUCTURE OPEN AND ALSO PROVIDE CARBON. MAKING SCRATCHES AND CUTS IN STEMS WILL OFFER AN ENTRY TO MICRO-ORGANISMS SO THAT DECOMPOSITION CAN OCCUR MORE QUICKLY = COMPOST**

## How do we compost our kitchen/green waste?

Ideally a compost bin needs to be tough enough to last a few years of being exposed to the elements and to withstand plenty of knocks. It should be easy to fill and empty, keep pets out, and heat in. The size of the bin required will depend upon the amount of compostable material produced.

### Open Heaps

This is the cheapest and simplest method of home composting. It does not need a container but is messy, slow and can get very large before becoming effective.

### Compost Bins

These are generally produced in plastic, at least part recycled, and come in all shapes and sizes. They produce compost in about 12 months and are easy to maintain.

### Creating your own compost bin

- Find a warm, level spot on bare soil or grass for your bin.
- You'll need to make frames, e.g. 75cm - 1m square, with enough frames to stack up to 1m. You can use a variety of materials, below are some:

Wood (e.g. old pallets)/Wire Meshing netting (e.g. chicken wire)/ Bricks (Bottom left clear)/Breeze Blocks (bottom left clear).

**Line with** thick cardboard/old carpet/woody prunings. (Ensures drainage/air circulation around the base).

**Cover with** old carpet/wooden lid/black polythene. (Ensures rain is kept out and heat is retained)



# Top Tips for Composting

- Always mix soft green wastes and tougher material. Avoid heavy layers of grass cuttings or leaves.
- Larger composters are more effective and efficient than smaller ones - large amounts of organic waste help to increase temperatures. Composting works best at high temperatures.
- Turn your compost heap regularly (at least once per month). This will improve air circulation and hasten up the rotting process.
- Keep the compost damp, but not wet.
- Keep the compost covered, heat and water will then be retained.
- When adding kitchen waste, bury it 15-30cm below the surface. This will keep flies away from the compost pile.
- A dark, rich fibrous compost should be produced after 6-12 months.
- If you have the space, you could be more effective at composting by having two compost bins. This way, one could be used for all of the fresh waste to go into - and the other to hold the rotting compost.



# Problem Solving

## My composter doesn't work, what am I doing wrong?

POSSIBLE CAUSES	SOLUTION
Pile maybe too small	Make the pile larger
Insufficient water	Add more fruit & vegetable peelings, tea bags, grass cuttings.
Not enough Air	Regularly turn the pile
Lack of Nitrogen	Add green waste, manure.

## My compost heap is slimy and it smells, what can I do?

POSSIBLE CAUSES	SOLUTION
Too much water	Try turning the pile and adding some dry, porous material (e.g. leaves, sawdust). Also try leaving the lid off for a period of time in dry weather.
Too compact	Try turning the pile or make it smaller
Too much Nitrogen	Add brown materials such as leaves and wood chip (which are rich in carbon).

## Flies are attracted to my compost heap, how can I get rid of them?

Do not add any material that you're not meant to e.g. cooked food. Ensure all of your kitchen scraps are buried about 15-30cm below the surface and covered by other material e.g. garden waste or cardboard.

## Are there any alternatives to composting?

**Wormery** - Wormeries produce probably the best compost of all but they do require most attention. The worms are Brandlings or Tiger worms and are often used as fish bait. Wormeries can be kept outside but must be kept frost free, so during the winter they may need to be placed in a garage or shed.

**Leaf Mould** - Autumn leaves can be placed in an open topped wire cage and left for 1 to 2 years. Worms will convert them into a leaf mould, which can be a base for potting compost.

## Where can I buy a compost bin?

Bins can be purchased at cost price and as special offers through your local authority's. Your local authorities information leaflet is attached to this booklet. Alternatively, contact details are provided below.

**Pembrokeshire County Council** *Tel* 0845 6021386  
*Email* waste.strategy@pembrokeshire.gov.uk  
*Website* www.pembrokeshire.gov.uk

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**Ceredigion County Council** *Tel* 01970 633010 or 01545 572572  
*Email* hpw@ceredigion.gov.uk  
*Website* www.ceredigion.gov.uk

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**Carmarthenshire County Council** *Tel* 01267 234567  
*Website* www.carmarthenshire.gov.uk

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**Bridgend County Borough Council** *Tel* 01656 643439  
*Email* jonesbg1@bridgend.gov.uk  
*Website* www.bridgend.gov.uk

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**Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council** *Tel* 01792 512581  
*Email* a.shields@neath-porttalbot.gov.uk  
*Website* www.neath-porttalbot.gov.uk

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**City & County of Swansea** *Tel* 01792 635600  
*Email* recycling@swansea.gov.uk  
*Website* www.swansea.gov.uk

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