



Chartered
Institute of
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Health



Good composting practice

Guidance on composting without attracting rodents



Recycling of garden and vegetable waste has been carried out for many years on allotments and within people's gardens by using a compost heap.

Recently there has been increasing environmental pressure to reduce materials sent to landfill sites. One method is to turn garden and household waste where possible into compost. This has led to the increased use of plastic compost bins.

What is compost?

Compost is the result of the natural breakdown of organic materials by bacteria, fungi and insects.

Why compost?

- Composting is nature's own method of waste disposal
- Once made, compost can be used to fertilise soil
- Approximately 11 million tonnes of organic waste is produced by homes in the UK each year
- It reduces pressure on overused landfill sites
- It benefits the environment by reducing methane at landfill sites (one of the major causes of global warming)
- It produces a great soil conditioner for your garden and plants
- As much as 25 percent of all your household waste can be composted, instead of being thrown away into landfill
- It's easy and free

Where to compost

DIY compostors can be made from scrap timber, old tyres, bricks or wire mesh. Compost heaps or modern plastic compost bins should be sited in the garden, as far away as possible from the dwelling.

As a general rule, the larger the bin the more efficiently it will perform.

Always place the bin in a sunny, well drained area directly onto soil.

What to use to make compost

A range of items can be used to make compost:

- Fallen leaves, hedge trimmings, grass cuttings
- Kitchen waste including raw vegetables, fruit, egg shells, tea bags and ground coffee
- Old plants, weeds and flowers
- Shredded paper, cardboard

What not to use to make compost

It is important that your compost heap or bin does not become a health hazard, attracting unwanted flies, rats and other pests. You should never include the following in your compost:

- Meat, fish and dairy products
- Cooked food and bread
- Nappies or used tissues
- Cat litter and dog faeces

Maintenance of compostors

It is essential to place wire mesh under the compost heap/bin, although be careful not to leave protruding wire in order to minimise the risk of injury to you and your pets. Mesh with a hole size of 10mm or less is ideal.

Composters have to be looked after and well-maintained, for instance:

Regular checks should be made to ensure that your compost heap has not attracted rats.

Signs to look for would be clean holes within the compost material where a rat could have burrowed in or any holes in the ground around the base of the heap leading into the rotting matter.

A similar check needs to be made with plastic compost bins: look for any holes around the base of the bin or any holes/scratch marks on the bin.

If any holes or marks on the compostor are found, indicating rodent activity, take the appropriate action by contacting your local pest control service.

Managed properly compost heaps and bins will not create problems. If they are not properly maintained they can be an attraction for rats, as they provide food, shelter and warmth.



Composting tips

Start filling with kitchen and garden waste.

For best results use a mix of different materials.

Keep the compost moist by adding water if necessary (but not too wet).

Turn the heap by forking/agitating every few weeks - this aerates the heap and accelerates the composting process.



For further advice go to:
www.direct.gov.uk
www.wrap.org.uk/composting



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