

## GO GREEN, START A COMPOST PILE

Composting involves the break down or decay of waste organic matter by fungi and bacteria. The "green" waste suitable for composting includes fruit and vegetable peelings, grass clippings, dead flowers, and so on. The "brown" waste suitable includes shredded non-glossy paper, straw and chopped up twigs. There is no reason why we should toss these materials into expensive garden waste bags, when we can turn them into rich compost in our own gardens. Working well-rotted compost into your beds will improve the structure of either heavy or sandy soils. Compost also acts as a slow release plant food.

Composters are easy to build. One of the cheapest and easiest methods is to get your hands on four old wooden pallets, attach them at the corners to four wooden stakes driven firmly into the ground, and you have yourself a well-ventilated composter. Or you can buy one of the many types available from Lee Valley and other garden stores. Ideally, locate your composter in partial sunlight, as full sun will cause contents to dry out, slowing the decomposition process. Your compost heap should be well ventilated, and make sure that the base is in direct contact with the soil. This will allow fat, juicy earthworms to enter the mix and speed up decomposition.

Another important factor affecting the speed of decomposition is moisture, too much or too little will cause compost formation to become a long drawn out affair. When adding very dry materials such as untreated wood shavings or cardboard it helps maintain the heap's moisture level by lightly sprinkling the layer with water. You could of course add a water-rich "green" material such as grass clippings, however you should follow this again with an equal layer of "brown" high carbon material such as straw or shredded paper. An excess of brown material slows the formation of compost whereas an excess of green material for example grass clippings results in a slimy silage heap exuding all manner of smells and juices.

Your well-layered compost heap will take around nine months to provide you with its brown gold, if the balancing act of moisture, air, heat and materials is achieved. It will be well worth the wait.