

How to compost on the Southside of Glasgow



From vegetable peelings to nutrient-rich compost, this manual shows you how



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Introduction

Composting is an easy way to recycle some of your domestic waste and saves you wasting money on fertiliser for your garden or houseplants. It is the process of turning biodegradable waste into nutritious compost. By composting you're making a reduction to the greenhouse gases which are contributing to climate change. It is a fairly simple process but when done incorrectly can often be counterproductive by actually increasing harmful emissions into the atmosphere.

This guide explains how to compost effectively and gives top tips for residents on the Southside of Glasgow. Composting is easy and this guide makes it even easier by explaining everything you need to know, such as what kind of waste to use, how to get the right balance of different types of waste and when your compost is ready to use.

Why composting is so important

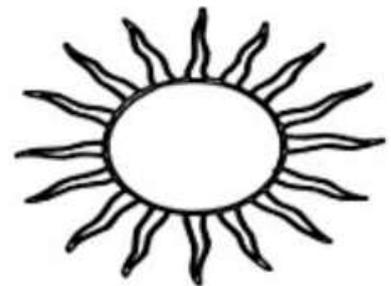
Around half the waste that goes in most kitchen bins could have been composted - but instead it goes with the rest of the general waste into landfill. The lack of oxygen in landfill results in the production, from otherwise compostable waste, of methane. Methane is a harmful greenhouse gas which contributes to global warming. If you compost biodegradable waste properly you can avoid this and make nutrient-rich compost which you can use in your garden or donate to a nearby community garden or school. Producing compost reduces greenhouse gases, which slows climate change.



Getting started

- **Positioning**

The first thing to think about is the best place to position your compost bin. In order for the waste to break down there needs to be a decent amount of heat built up inside the bin, so a sunnier spot is preferable although not essential. We recommend raising your compost bin off the ground slightly as it's good to have an airflow coming from underneath (particularly if you're putting your bin on concrete slabs). Insects and worms in your compost bin are a good sign but they may mean you don't want the bin next to any seating area you have in your garden.



- **Choosing your compost bin**



There are lots of different designs of compost bins. Choose one which allows good circulation of air and easy access to turn the rotting matter, and you will be more likely to produce good compost. The plastic cone bins (above left) allow very little airflow inside and the lack of oxygen often results in compost not breaking down properly and instead producing methane, just as it would do in landfill. Their side doors are also small, making it more difficult to turn the compost properly. This is counterproductive in terms of reducing your carbon footprint and means the waste won't break down into compost. You can tell when your compost is starved of oxygen as it will get slimy and will smell bad. The wooden-box design (above right) is better in terms of airflow, but having no side door makes turning the compost difficult.

The compost bins South Seeds has designed and supplies are built from recycled pallets which can be easily found around Govanhill and Pollokshields. Many small businesses give them out for free (for example: local greengrocers, builders' merchants, or DIY shops). They have the same benefits as the other wooden-box design in terms of airflow but we have designed the whole front to open out so it's easy to get in with a fork and turn the contents. We also put a lid on top of the bin to keep in the heat, and line it with close-knit chicken wire to keep out vermin and pets.



- **Compost caddies**

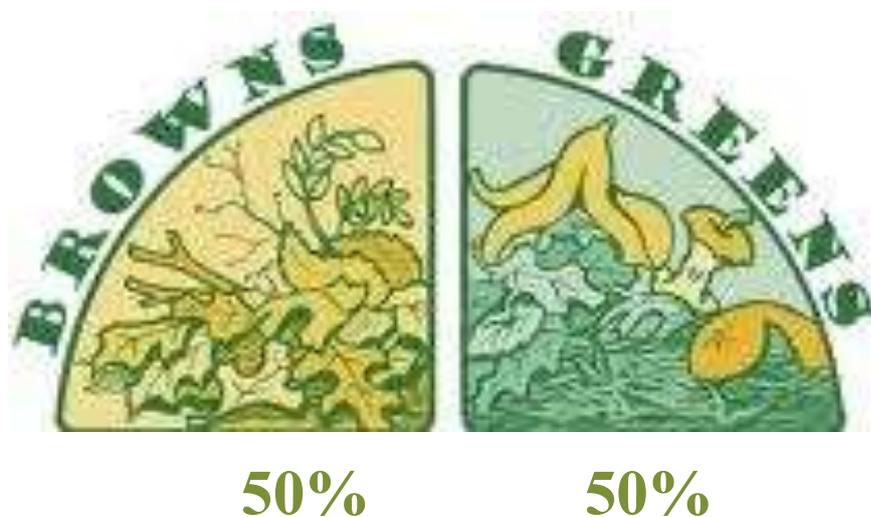


Much of the waste that goes into compost bins comes from your kitchen, so it's a good idea to get a compost caddy to transport the waste. As you'll keep it in your kitchen the most important thing is that it has a lid. Just like any other waste receptacle if it doesn't have a lid it will attract flies and eventually start to smell bad. It's also good practice to wash your caddy now and then. You can get compostable bin liners for the inside of your caddy which can be bought on the internet, or you can use a sheet of newspaper. This stops residue building up at the bottom of the caddy and makes it easier to keep clean.



Green and brown waste

There are two different kinds of waste you can compost: green waste ('wet waste'), which contains nitrogen, and brown waste ('dry waste'), which contains carbon. Green waste consists of fruit and vegetable peelings, green plant material, used teabags, and coffee grounds. Brown waste consists of cardboard, newspaper, straw bedding from pet cages, eggshells, leaves and woody plant material. In order to make good-quality compost you want a 50:50 balance between the green waste and brown waste. Having too much green waste will result in your compost becoming very sludgy and it will also smell bad. Having too much brown waste will result in your compost becoming dry and dusty.



What you can and can't compost

It is important to be clear about what you can and can't compost. Adding material that doesn't break down, or breaks down at different rates, can cause lots of problems. Here is a table to keep you right.

The numbers in brackets correspond to the notes on the next page

Waste you can compost	Waste you can't compost
<small>Green lettering = green waste Brown lettering = brown waste</small>	
Vegetable and fruit peelings (1)	Plastic (4)
Tea bags and coffee grounds	Glass
Garden and house plants (2)	Metals
Grass cuttings	Coal ash (5)
Cardboard and paper (3)	Nappies
Eggshells	Cat and dog litter (6)
Contents of your vacuum cleaner	Cooking oil
Bedding from pet cages	Meat and fish (7)
Leaves	Dairy products (7)
Woody plant material	Bread (7)
Hair (human or animal)	Cooked food (7)

Notes:

1. As well as composting fruit and vegetable peelings, it is also possible to compost whole vegetables and fruit which have gone off. They will simply take a bit longer to break down into compost. Don't add too many citrus fruit peelings (orange, lemon and lime) to your compost as this will make your compost acidic. They also take a little longer to break down than other fruit and vegetable peelings. If you do use a lot of citrus fruit it's a good idea to chop the peel into small pieces before adding it to your compost bin.



2. Although you can compost all plants, you may cause yourself problems if you add the more aggressive weeds such as docks, dandelions and couch grass (pictured below in order) as they are likely to come back once you start to use your compost. You can stop this from happening by cutting off roots from the weeds before adding them to the bin, and make sure you don't add weeds that have finished flowering and gone to seed. You should avoid adding any diseased plants as the composting process may not eliminate the disease, which might then continue to spread within the compost.



3. Cardboard and paper are great to compost but you will first need to check which items are actually compostable. A lot of cardboard has a plastic coating on it which won't compost. You can compost newspapers but watch out for magazines or flyers which are not compostable. When composting cardboard and paper it will speed up the process if you shred the paper and rip up the cardboard.



4. Plastic is an absolute no. There are some materials that look very similar to plastic that you can compost - such as the compostable bin liners mentioned earlier, or Vegware. If you see material in your compost bin that looks like plastic, check with your neighbours whether it is compostable before you give them a hard time.



5. As coal ash contains high levels of both iron and sulphur it is not recommended in your compost bin as they can be damaging to some plants. Wood ash, however, can be beneficial when added to your compost bin, particularly if the compost is too acidic.



6. It is possible to compost cat and dog litter but it is best to do it separately from regular compostable waste. This is because the breakdown rates are different. It is not recommended to use composted faeces from omnivores (including humans) on edible plants, unless it has been exposed to a high-temperature compost for a few years so harmful pathogens are destroyed. Manure from herbivores (cows, sheep, horses etc) is fine for using on edible plants, although it needs to have rotted down for at least four to five months before it comes into contact with any seedlings, as it can harm young plants when fresh. Adding livestock manure to your compost is very good for it and will speed up the composting process. On the Southside of Glasgow you can pick up free manure from Pollok Park throughout the winter. You can get access to both cow and horse manure in bays at the Nether Pollok playing fields entrance to the park just off Higgs Road.



7. While it is possible to compost cooked food, meat, fish, bread and dairy products, these all break down at a different rate from other compostable waste. Therefore this type of waste can be troublesome, and means a lot more work turning it regularly. Adding this kind of smelly waste to your compost also attracts pests such as rats and foxes, particularly in urban areas.



Managing your compost bin



Compost bins should have two or more bays, so that compost can be stored at different stages. Once the first bay is full up move on to the second, leaving the first to rot down. If you're turning the first bay fairly regularly, ideally by the time the second bay is full the compost from the first bay should have rotted down and be ready to empty and use in the garden. If it's a communal compost bin it's a good idea to put up some signs (pictured above) to encourage neighbours to understand how the process works.

Turning your compost

- **Why turning is good**

Ideally you want to be turning your compost once a week. By turning your compost you're allowing more air to get in. You are also mixing the bacteria. There is less bacteria on the material near the outside, so by bringing it into the centre of the pile where most of the bacteria are present it will break down more quickly. Turning your compost reheats the pile and speeds up the whole breakdown process. If you want to speed up your composting, start turning it every couple of days. If you're happy to wait a bit longer for your compost you don't need to turn it as often. Realistically, many people only turn their compost once a month and are happy to wait a number of months for the compost to be produced.

- **How to turn your compost**

Turning your compost is fairly straightforward. Probably the best tool to use for the job would be a garden fork or spade (preferably both). Essentially you're trying to get material on the outside mixed into the centre of the pile. If you come across any thick, stodgy matter try to break that up as much as you can. Do the same if you come across any larger items, such as cardboard that is still in one piece or any whole pieces of fruit or vegetables.



When to use your compost

- **How do you know when it's ready?**

Here are some of the tell-tale signs of when your compost is ready.

1. It should look dark and crumbly.
2. It should have an earthy smell to it.
3. The pile should have shrunk to about half its original size.
4. The waste you've been adding should no longer be recognisable (don't worry if there is still the occasional item here and there).



- **How to use your compost**

Once your compost is ready you can use it for all sorts of purposes about the garden. Because it so rich in nutrients, it is very beneficial. Here are a few suggestions on how to use your compost.

- 1) Digging a 10cm-thick layer of your homemade compost into a garden bed prior to planting out will give your new plants a real boost.



- 2) Spreading a 5cm-thick layer of compost, also known as mulch, on top of your garden beds around plants will enrich the soil, feed existing plants and suppress young weeds.



- 3) Topping up some of your pot plants in your house or garden with your compost will replenish them with nutrients



- 4) You can use your compost to make potting mixture for seedlings. Compost by itself would be too strong, so mix in some ordinary soil from the garden to create your own potting mix. The ideal ratio for a potting mix is one part compost to three parts soil.



- **Can't use your compost?**

If you can't use your compost in your own garden you can always donate it to local growers. It's worth approaching schools, allotments and community groups which run gardening projects. They may be delighted to receive your compost.



What is South Seeds?

South Seeds is a community-led organisation based in the south of Glasgow. Our main aim is to reduce the carbon footprint of the areas we work in: Govanhill, Crosshill, Queen's Park, Strathbungo and Pollokshields East. South Seeds provides residents with food-growing opportunities, and support to reduce home energy bills and tackle food-waste issues.

South Seeds website: www.southseeds.org

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South Seeds is a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation, registered in Scotland with
charity number: SCO42244