

Composting at Home

It's easy to build your own compost bin to turn your garden waste into a free, nutrient rich compost for your plants.

If you have a small amount of garden waste you can use something as simple as large plastic tubs to make compost in. Larger gardens may require a bigger area and pallets arranged in a square or chicken wire round 2 or 3 garden canes will provide the area you need for composting.

This factsheet outlines four different ways to start composting your garden waste at home.

Composting in a bag

You don't need to build a bin to compost. You could fill black bin bags with leaves, lawn clippings and whatever else you have to hand. Make sure there's a few holes in the bags to allow air to circulate and leave in a corner of the garden to gradually rot down. Make sure the leaves are moist and turn the bags occasionally to help with the process. It will take around two years to produce a well-rotted leaf mould for use in your garden.

Composting in an old plastic tub

This type of compost bin uses one plastic container inside another one. Your garden waste will be added to the top container and the bottom container will catch the liquid that leaches out of the first bin and can be used as a nutrient rich 'tea' for your garden.

You will need:

- 2 large plastic storage containers, one with a well-fitting lid. (You might already have some old ones you can repurpose)
- A drill
- 2 bricks

1. Your compost needs air circulating around it to decompose. Drill holes in the container with a lid. This is the container you will use as the top container and will add your garden waste to. Holes should be 1 to 2 inches apart and on all sides of the container including the bottom.

2. Put your bricks in the base of the bottom container and put the container with the holes on top.

3. Add your garden waste and replace the lid.

4. Regularly aerate your compost by giving the container a shake or stirring it with a garden fork or spade.

Build a bin from wooden pallets

This is a larger compost bin which you will need a bigger space in your garden for.

You will need:

- 4 wooden pallets (people often give these away locally)
- 4 wooden posts
- Cable ties or nails and a hammer
- A piece of old carpet
- A friend to help hold the pallets up while you join them together
- Chicken wire (optional)



1. Clear the area of ground where your compost bin will be
2. If using, lay your chicken wire on the ground where your compost bin will go. This can help to deter pests from getting into your compost bin.
3. Stand the first pallet on its edge at the back of where your compost bin will go and ask your friend to hold it in place.
4. Slot a post through the pallet at each end and hammer into the ground to hold in place.
5. Add two more pallets at right angles to form the sides and nail or use cable ties to attach them to the back pallet. Hammer in the other two posts through the front of the side pallets.
6. It's a good idea to keep the front pallet removable to give access to your compost, so you could cable tie it on at one side to form a makeshift gate.
7. Add your garden waste and cover with the piece of old carpet. This will keep your compost warm and speed up the process.

Build a bin with chicken wire

This method allows you to choose the right size of compost bin for your garden, but it's not as sturdy as making a bin from pallets.

You will need:

A length of chicken wire (length depends on the size you require your bin to be, 3m of wire will give you a bin with a diameter of approx. 1m).

2 or 3 wooden posts/stakes or canes

Cable ties/garden twine

1. Clear the area you want to use for your compost bin. A flat area of bare soil is best.
2. Lay your chicken wire out on the ground and weigh it down with stones, bricks or spare pots etc. to keep it in place while you work
3. Attach your canes, posts or stakes to the chicken wire. You'll need at least two, more if you have a longer piece of chicken wire. Canes can be woven in and out of the wire, posts and stakes can be attached with cable ties or garden twine. The first cane should be around 20cm from one end of the chicken wire, you can then wrap the end of the wire round the cane to keep it secure.
4. Bring the ends of the wire together to form a circle and push the canes into the ground to secure the compost bin in place. If you are using stakes, you may need to hammer them in.
5. For health and safety, it's a good idea to use cane toppers if your canes stick up further than the chicken wire. You can use empty bottles, cans, table tennis balls, or drill holes in corks.