

# Composting - getting results



**Helpful tips and useful  
advice for new and  
experienced composters**



# Easy fixes for common composting problems

If you don't find the answer you are looking for, please contact the Compost Doctors for more information.



## Composting garden waste - some commonly asked questions

### I have a lot of flies

These are fruit flies and are common and harmless. To prevent them, cover materials waiting to be composted with newspaper or a lid. When adding them to the compost bin, cover them with a layer of soil, grass cuttings or cardboard. Alternatively try leaving the lid off overnight or bury new ingredients below the surface.

### I have seen evidence of rats

If you live near water, farmland, open countryside or derelict buildings, you are likely to already have rats visiting your garden.

You can discourage rats by taking some simple steps:

- rats don't like disturbance - tap the composter when you pass
- rats like dry environments, so keep your compost moist
- rats don't like crossing open spaces - put the bin away from walls or fences that provide a sheltered 'runway'
- if your compost bin is open underneath, put thick wire mesh under the bottom to prevent rats getting in



### Can I compost rose prunings/leaves?

It is not recommended as some rose diseases (especially black spot) survive the composting process and could re-infect new roses.



### What about poisonous plants, evergreen shrubs (such as leylandii) or rhubarb tops?

Although poisonous when growing, these can be composted as the toxins break down during the composting process. If you have large quantities of evergreen clippings, compost them by putting them in a

heap, adding 'green' materials (such as grass clippings) and water well. Leave for 6-12 months and use as a mulch around established trees and shrubs.



### **Can I put all my grass cuttings in the bin?**

Grass cuttings are fine but too many will cause a problem as they 'slump' and exclude air. They are also rich in nitrogen and heat up as they rot making the bin wet, smelly and slimy. Try mixing them with more fibrous 'brown' materials (such as torn up cardboard, straw or scrunched up paper) which add air pockets and balance nitrogen levels. Alternatively, store them in the sun to dry off and add them gradually over time.



### **Can I put weeds in?**

Weeds can go in, but avoid perennial weeds which can re-grow in the bin. Also avoid annual weeds which have gone to seed, as the seeds can germinate when you use the compost. A good way to get rid of perennial weeds such as nettles, couch grass, dock or bindweed, is to chop them up and leave them in a tied bin liner in the sun until they get hot and go brown and sludgy. Or, put them in a bucket of water with the lid on and add them to the compost bin when they have decomposed.

### **What if I have too much green waste to fit in?**

Chop it up as small as you can and leave it on the ground in a corner of your garden. The decomposition process will begin and you can add it bit by bit to your compost, when you have room. If you still have too much, you can take it to your household waste recycling site or use a green waste kerbside collection service, if available.

### **Can I compost all my autumn leaves?**

Autumn leaves take a long time to compost. Small amounts are OK, but it is best to compost the rest separately in loosely tied plastic sacks, well watered, with plenty of holes or in a 'leaf-mould' container with 4 posts surrounded by chicken wire.



## How will I know when my compost is ready?

- A Green Cone unit will not produce compost.
- A Green Johanna will produce its first batch of compost in approximately six months, and every 3-4 months thereafter.
- With a Kitchen Composter the resulting materials can be buried in soil, or placed in a compost bin or heap after 2 weeks.
- A Garden Composter takes approximately 6-9 months (unless you use an activator, which the Compost Doctors can advise on). Compost at the bottom should be dark brown in colour with a spongy, soil-like texture.
- A Wormery will produce a dark liquid fertilizer every few days and also produces a small amount of rich compost (worm casts) after 6-12 months.



## Why does my unit smell bad?

- The Green Cone is a sealed unit and when properly installed emits no smells.
- The Green Johanna will smell of ammonia if not enough 'brown' carbon-rich material is added. Add some torn-up paper or card and mix the contents well with the stirring stick.
- Using a Kitchen Composter is an odour free process.
- A Garden Composter may need turning or stirring. Also mix in some carbon-rich material like torn-up cardboard.
- If your Wormery starts to smell, you have overfed the worms or put in too much of one type of material or it is lacking in air. You can help by putting rubber gloves on and stirring up any uneaten food as this allows the oxygen to penetrate.



**For more help and advice contact the Compost Doctors on 01273 482995, email [compostdoctor@eastsussex.gov.uk](mailto:compostdoctor@eastsussex.gov.uk) or see [www.eastsussex.gov.uk/composting](http://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/composting)**

