



Compost.

Compost is a rich brown soil-like material made from 'organic' waste such as garden cuttings and food waste. With the right stuff, composting will happen. There is no need for expensive equipment or tools; just a heap in the corner of the garden, and time, is enough.

Composting is an entirely natural process where organic waste is broken down by billions of natural organisms such as bugs, fungi and bacteria. In a single teaspoon of compost there could be 600 million useful bacteria at work and their numbers could double within the hour. This rapid bacterial growth is the main reason why large compost heaps get so hot.

Did you know?

We throw away about 7 million tonnes of food waste every year in the UK and about half could have been eaten. All of this could have been composted.

For more information about food waste, see the National 'Love food hate waste' website.

<http://england.lovefoodhatewaste.com/>

What can be composted?

The compost test is; 'If it has lived recently, it will compost'.

Using this test; paper (made from wood) will compost, and plastic (made from oil) will not.

Lots of households already compost either at home or through a council collection. A compost caddy in the kitchen is ideal because this is where food is being prepared and scraps can be thrown in as easily as putting them in the bin. Composting is great for the environment and your soil and there are also lots of things that can be composted easily including; vegetable peelings, tea bags / coffee grinds, bread, egg shells, tissues, uneaten raw food scraps, such as salad.

If you have a council compost collection you may also be able to compost plate scrapings and cooked food.

Where can I compost?

The best place to compost is in your own garden. Home composting is particularly good because it will give you healthy soil, improve your soil structure and provide a healthy natural environment for your soil organisms and the food chains that rely on them. Composting at home also means that the 'waste' does not need to be collected or processed saving energy and reducing pollution.

For those who can't compost at home, European legislation (known as the Landfill Directive) was introduced to reduce the problems of methane where compostable waste is buried in landfill sites. This legislation has led to many Councils collecting food or garden waste directly from our houses. Once collected, the organic waste may then be composted in a number of ways, including;

Windrow Composting - this is simply organic waste that has been shredded and piled into huge heaps outdoors. When this type of process is used on its own, it usually deals with garden waste only. Natural bacterial activity in these heaps can see temperatures rocket to over 80 degrees C. On a few occasions windrow heaps have got so hot they have burst into flames!

In-Vessel Composting – This method of composting is needed when food is composted with garden waste. Because of regulations, this process cooks food and garden waste together using natural bacteria inside tunnels (or vessels) before being piled outdoors in windrows to complete composting. This cooking process kills any potentially harmful bacteria that could be spread by wildlife including birds.

Anaerobic Digestion – This process deals with food or liquid food wastes which are loaded into sealed containers to produce gas and a soil like product used for agriculture.

Garden waste can also be taken to Recycling Centres where it is composted and used for agriculture or land restoration.

In some areas, local people get together to form community composting groups. These groups often allow locals to drop off their garden waste and sell compost produced back to the community. The advantage of community composting is that the garden waste does not travel long distances and can be used locally.

To find out more about general composting see the Devon Community Composting Network Website.
<http://www.dccn.typepad.com/>

Find out loads more about Devon's rubbish at <http://zone.recycledevon.org/>