

Making a New Zealand compost box

Introduction

Wooden compost bins hold the heat in well and reduce the need for turning whilst keeping the pile tidy while it decays. An efficient size has two cubic metre compartments, with removable slats at the front to allow for easy access to the compost.

Resources

- 9 - 2m x 1cm x 10cm planks
- 27 - 1m x 1cm x 10cm planks
- 18 - 95cm x 1cm x 10cm planks for front slats
- 6 - 1.3m x 5cm x 5cm length timber for uprights
- 5 - 1m x 5cm x 3.5 cm length of timber to make slots for slats
- Galvanised nails
- Linseed oil
- Paint brush

Note: These measurements are given as a general guide.

Activity

1. Brush linseed oil on all the wood (this will help preserve it) before building the compost box. Pay special attention to ends and corners. Let it dry thoroughly.
2. Lay three of the 5cm x 5cm uprights parallel, a metre apart and nail the nine 2m planks to the top metre of these uprights, leaving a small 1cm gap between each plank
3. Nail one end of the 27 1m planks to the top metre of the three remaining uprights, ie nine planks per upright. Leave small gaps between the planks as before.
4. Dig six holes 30cm deep to take the six uprights at the six corners of the 1m squares.
5. Fit the three back uprights into their respective holes, but only fill up and firm the ground round the upright at one end. Put the front upright of the first end into its hole. Holding a brick against the back upright to take the shock of the hammering, nail the free ends of the planks of the side to the back upright. Fill in the hole around the front upright and tread it firm. Fit the middle and other end in the same way. You now have a strong wooden letter 'E' shape.
6. The 18 95cm planks are used to make up the removable board fronts. These fit into slots made by nailing the 5cm x 3.5cm timber about 2cm in behind the front uprights. Three are needed to make the slots on both sides of the middle divider. (You may need to adjust length of slats to make best fit).

Top Tip

Speed up the composting process

Cover the top with thick card and a sheet of plastic. Alternatively, make a 1m square wooden lid for each side.



Top tip

Tips for buying wood

- Buy second hand or recycled wood where possible, though it can be more difficult to find out whether it was treated with preservatives. Avoid the use of preservatives wherever possible. They are, by their nature, persistent and toxic products.
- Buy new timber from sustainable sources. Look out for accredited wood products such as the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) or the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC)
- Most timber sold for outdoor use may already have been treated with preservative and not labelled as such, eg 'pressure treated timber'. Timber sold for indoor use is likely to be more expensive, but will be untreated.
- See Garden Organic Guidelines www.gardenorganic.org.uk/guidelines

Health & safety

Use tools safely according to manufacturers' instructions. Ensure adult supervision at all times. Wear gloves as required to protect skin from abrasion and splinters. Keep a safe distance between working teams. Handle materials carefully, especially long planks of wood, being aware of people nearby.