

## ENVIRONMENT

# Make Good Compost Fast!

There is a magic recipe for composting organic waste successfully in bins if you want the breakdown to be quick.



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The ingredients do not matter as much as their moisture content does. The types of things you compost vary by wet and dry, and the table on the right lists the potential compostable organics from your home and garden.

### The mix

In your compost bin, how much you use of each ingredient is critical. The general rule with standard bins is an even mix between wet and dry (50/50), but if you're using an Aerobin, the latest composting technology, this is not the case.

With Aerobin, the trick of its quick composting is its "lung", which is at the centre of the bin. This "lung" draws the air up from the bottom and disperses it throughout the mix of materials. This is critical in rapid composting, because this air is important to microscopic bacteria and fungi that consume the green waste, turning it into the sweet humus plants and gardeners alike crave so

much. With so much air being drawn through, the moisture in the bins evaporates quicker, drying the contents and killing the microbe base off.

So with Aerobin, the trick is a 70/30 mix of wet/dry materials in the bin, ideally mixed up. If you don't have that ratio available, it's worth considering watering some fish emulsion over the top of the mixture every week or so. Nine litres of fish emulsion to a 400 litre bin is perfect.

### The secrets

The secrets to success are chopping all the particles into the smallest possible size. The smaller the particle size, the bigger the bacterial population in the bin and the quicker it breaks down. It's also important you mix the contents. This can be as simple as laying three different layers of materials finely chopped and mixing them together each time you load the bin. With prunings and other garden waste, use high-quality mulchers like Hansa's to make sure they are cut into the smallest possible size.

If your Aerobin is working properly, it should get very hot. If it's not heating up, you can boost microbe populations by adding bonemeal or

### DRY

Dry lawn clippings  
Shredded newspaper or other paper  
Leaves and garden refuse  
Dry surface mulch from the garden  
Cardboard  
Cotton or wool

### WET

Fresh lawn clippings  
Weeds  
Kitchen green scraps  
Green branches and prunings  
Vegetable garden waste  
Chicken manure

Don't use meats, bones, dog droppings or coffee grinds.

blood and bone. Fish emulsion will also help if it's in the weekly watering can mix. Raw chicken manure placed in fine layers really boosts the breakdown.

### Is it working?

If your bin is working at its best, you should start getting humus in 10 to 12 weeks. If it's longer than 15 weeks, your blend is not right or your moisture levels are too low. Static or anaerobic compost bins will take as long as nine months. The good thing about aerobic composting systems

is they break down quickly and this reduces the amount of the potent greenhouse gas methane (which is 21 times more potent than carbon dioxide). The remedy to a poor-performing bin is to give it a boost with chicken, fish or blood and bone, and increasing the moisture content to get it back on track. When you lift the lid off an Aerobin, it should be dripping with moisture. This effect is not dissimilar to the floor of the tropical rainforest – hot, humid and musty to smell and feel. That's your goal to achieve.