

USING COMPOST IN THE GARDEN

There are lots of different ways to use home-made compost in the garden.

How we use the compost depends on how fine it is.

Composting goes through 2 stages: a hot fast stage and a much cooler longer one.

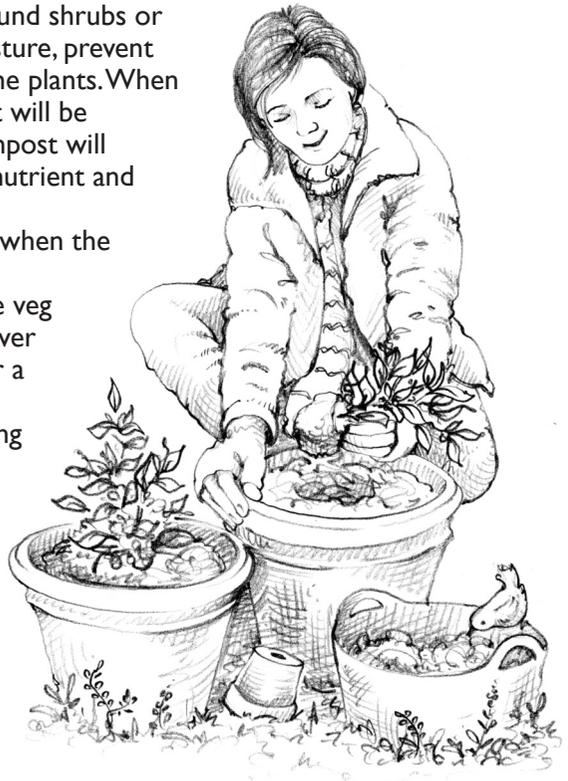
After 3-6 months in a plastic composter or 1 year in a wooden box, the heap begins to cool down. At this stage, the compost is rough and fibrous, looking almost like manure. Use this for mulching.

After 1 year in a plastic bin and 2 years in a large wooden box, the cool composting process is finished and the compost looks like fine soil.

Use compost as a mulch

Rough compost is spread on the ground between vegetables, in a flower border or round shrubs or trees. This mulch will conserve moisture, prevent weeds growing and gradually feed the plants. When it rains, goodness from the compost will be washed down to the roots. The compost will continue to rot down and will add nutrient and structure to the ground.

- Plan to spread a mulch after rain, when the soil is moist. This stops evaporation.
- If you're spreading compost in the veg garden or round shrubs or trees cover the damp ground with cardboard or a thick layer of newspaper. This will prevent weed seeds from germinating in the soil.
- Spread a layer of compost on top of the card or paper to completely cover it. Keep the mulch approximately 3cm away from plant stems. Any seeds in the compost will germinate, but then die because their roots won't get down to the soil.



- If you're spreading compost in an herbaceous border, carefully cover the damp soil between the plants with 5-8 cm of compost. Some, but not many, weeds may germinate without the cardboard underlay.

Dig compost into the soil

Adding compost will improve soil fertility and structure. If you are then planting small seedlings, use finished compost. More established plants will tolerate slightly rougher material.

Do not overfeed the soil as this would encourage excessive leaf growth at the expense of flowers. Spread 1 barrowload for every 10m².

Use in pots and containers

Home-made compost releases nutrients more slowly than commercially produced composts, so it provides feed for plants over a much longer period. If potting a small plant, sieve the compost to remove any stick fragments or small stones.

Depending on the plant and your watering arrangements you may want to add grit or water retaining gel.

The surface of the compost may gradually sink but you can top it up with extra home made compost. This will provide fresh nutrient.

Potting mixes

You can make excellent, free, seed sowing and potting compost, using your own compost and leafmould. You can use coir fibre or green waste instead of leafmould. Mix and sieve the ingredients. A 'Rotasieve' is ideal.

The proportions of compost and bulking agent depends on the size of the plant.

Use:

- For seed sowing. 1 part compost: 2 parts leafmould
- Pricking out: 1 part compost: 1 part leafmould
- Final planting (tomatoes, peppers etc): pure compost.

Use as a fertiliser

Wormcast is the best for this. It is very rich and is used as a feed, especially for container grown plants.

It is suitable for house plants too.

For more information on home composting or to contact us - www.askorganic.co.uk or 01450 860778

ASK Organic, in partnership with Scottish Borders Council, has a Home Composting Display within Woodside Plant Centre, by Ancrum, Jedburgh.



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