

Composting Champions Frequently Asked Questions

1. Why is my compost so smelly?

Smelly compost may indicate your compost is acidic, too wet or not aerated enough. A common cause is putting in too much food waste and not enough dry ingredients.

- Add more coarse material like leaves and sticks, straw or shredded paper.
- Mix the heap more regularly with spiral tool or garden fork.
- If already wet, don't add any extra water to the mix
- Add a handful of garden lime
- Change the site if necessary - where your compost is sitting may not be well drained enough.

2. I am finding flies, earwigs and other pests are invading the compost bin?

There are millions of friendly critters in your compost which help to break down the food waste. The flies are most likely vinegar flies (they do not attack good fruit).

- Keep the compost damp and aerated
- Cover with a dry covering (e.g. straw, newspaper, etc)
- Put a hessian bag on top of the compost material
- Add some lime
- Plant some shrubs around the compost to attract the insect-eating birds

3. Why is my compost slow to breakdown?

If your compost is slow to break down, it could be because of lack of air, water or heat, or too much of one type of material. There are good ways to make great compost quicker!

- Compost too dry? - Add water - remember to give your compost a good soaking every 1 - 2 weeks.
- Compost too wet? - It might not be getting enough air to breathe, so use your spiral mixing tool or garden fork to turn the heap and loosen the material.
- Compost not heating up – Is it getting enough sun? If not, you may need to consider moving it to a sunnier position. Add more nitrogen-rich material, such as manure, young grass-clippings, or blood and bone. Turn the heap and add water. This can speed up the composting process.

4. How do we build up worm population

Earthworms will appear naturally to your compost heap. Maybe get a starter for your compost from another successful composter. These points will help encourage earthworms:

- Ensure your compost bin is positioned on the ground – not on concrete
- The right mixture of carbon-rich and nitrogen-rich materials will attract earthworms
- Keep the compost moist and warm

Compost worms are a special type of earthworm and are generally more active than normal earthworms, and can eat about half their body weight in one day.

- You can add compost worms to standard compost bins or heaps, as long as you do not let the contents of the bin get too hot. 2000 is a good start. These can be sourced from most Bunnings stores and many nurseries (Google 'Compost Worms' to find a supplier near you).

5. Our compost is never friable, fine and crumbly?

Finished compost is usually about half the volume of the materials that were added to the compost bin and should look, feel and smell like rich, dark soil.

The time this takes depends upon the amount of heat, moisture and air available. Be patient. Start a new lot of compost using a shovel full of this one as a starter and let this one continue to mature. Remember it is still being broken down by the good micro-organisms, so continue to look after it as such.

Your compost process can be accelerated by turning the compost frequently, maintaining good moisture levels, positioning the compost in a sunny location and adding materials such as animal manures or blood and bone.

6. Any tips on using the aerator more effectively/easily

Maybe try something different! A garden pitch fork is generally pretty effective.

Another way to get more air into your compost is to stick a stake or metal rod into the pile and wiggle it around to create an air pocket. Some people even drill holes along the length of PVC pipes and place the pipes horizontally as they build their compost pile.

7. Some mouldy dairy in bin

Mould (fungal growth) is quite normal, particularly when there are not enough other microbes to eat the nutrient rich mixture you have provided. It usually means you need more worms – they will keep the mould in check. Mix the contents well. If you already have lots of worms, you may be over-feeding or there may be too much acidic content so treat with a slow release pH buffer like crushed egg shells.

The following website explains this situation very well:

<http://www.redwormcomposting.com/general-questions/lots-of-mold-in-my-worm-bin/>

8. Does lime inhibit worm development?

The wrong kind of lime can kill worms. Lime is usually used to correct acidity (The pH of the heap will favour bacteria between pH 6 & 7.5. Fungi work well between 5.5 & 8.). Acidity is often detected by smell. Lime (calcium carbonate) may be mixed with the bedding material to correct acidity or to maintain a more favourable pH. Pulverized egg shells also correct acidity. Lime can be added as: DOLOMITE - calcium and magnesium carbonates, GYPSUM - calcium sulphate, agricultural LIME - calcium carbonate, or WOOD ASH which also adds potassium.

If you have any other questions please contact Ms Molly Odgers, Waste Management Coordinator, on 5760 2636 or molly.odgers@benalla.vic.gov.au