

Composting at School



Here is the information you need to make a real success of composting at school.

As with any other school activity you should ensure that your children are safe whilst composting.

The composting recipe

It is important that the materials put into the compost bin conform to the "green" and "brown" balance of 50:50 greens to browns. It is as simple as that. Examples are:

The greens	The browns
fruit waste	scrunched up thin cardboard
tea bags	cereal and tea packets
grass cuttings	shredded paper
annual plants and flowers	egg boxes

Add a 50:50 balance of greens and browns to keep the bins smelling of wet soil or the fruit you have put in it.



Composting can be used as a resource for work on:

- ④ Minibeasts
- ④ School grounds
- ④ Food chains
- ④ Micro-organisms and decay
- ④ Helping plants grow
- ④ Measuring
- ④ Improving the environment
- ④ Involving the local community in a multitude of ways

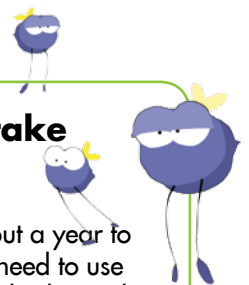
Why should we compost?

Composting diverts organic waste away from landfill where it would generate methane, a harmful greenhouse gas. Children can therefore compost their fruit waste from school and contribute to the reduction of methane into the atmosphere.



How long does it take to compost?

It will take your compost about a year to rot down, after which you'll need to use it. It will be perfect for flower beds or tubs around the school, or digging into your school vegetable patch.



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Getting started



1. Where to put your compost bin

Your bin should ideally be placed on earth so the minibeasts and red worms in the soil can get into the bin. The content of your bin will start to compost if it is placed on hard standing but liquid from the bin will stain concrete, flagstones and similar hard surfaces. Try to find a partly sunny site so the warmth of the sun will increase the rate of decomposition.

2. You will need to consider possible vandalism to your bin

If you think your bin may be vandalised then consider putting it into a locked up cage or locked enclosed area. Alternatively place the compost bin out of sight of any main roads. If this isn't possible consider getting a wormery which can be taken indoors at night.

3. Waste volumes

Many schools are given free fruit and this can generate large amounts of waste. It is not realistic to try and compost all this waste so do not try. It is much more important for children to learn that composting is enjoyable and interesting than to try and compost every single apple core.

4. Organisation

Schools that have composted successfully have generally adopted one of the following

approaches: Allocating the compost bin to one or two year groups so that every child will learn about composting during their time in school. Rotating the composting responsibility around the classes, perhaps having a term each.

5. Supervision

It is important that children are involved in collecting material for the compost bin. A designated adult needs to oversee the composting procedures you put in place. Don't assume that all will be well!

6. Collection of materials

Decide where and how you are going to collect the materials for composting. You may want to put collection points in the classrooms for fruit waste, in the staffroom to collect tea bags, in the office to collect shredded paper, and somewhere to collect and store cardboard packets. Make certain the containers are labelled so everybody knows what they are for. Schools frequently give this task to only one class and procedures need to be put in place to ensure that the correct materials are collected and stored.

7. Collection rota

Work out who is going to collect both the "green" and "brown" materials and empty them into the compost bin.



Your bin should ideally be placed on soil



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Creating good compost

The compost bin contents will rot down naturally without much human intervention. However, you need to be aware of the following:

Warmth

Place the compost bin in a partial sun if possible. If the only position available is in full sun make sure that the contents do not dry out. If the compost bin is placed in full shade the material will rot down at a slower rate.

Oxygen

The organisms in the compost breathe air like we do so giving the contents an occasional turn to aerate the bin will enable them to continue to compost. This can be done using a garden fork or a purpose made compost aerator. N.B. Take care if children use these implements!

Water

All the organisms in the bin also need a supply of water like we do. Test the moisture level by taking a gloved handful of the composting material and squeezing it. If the level is correct, you should see one or two drops of water emerge. If not, or if the bin contents look dry and dusty, then simply pour a watering can of water all over them.

Green/brown balance

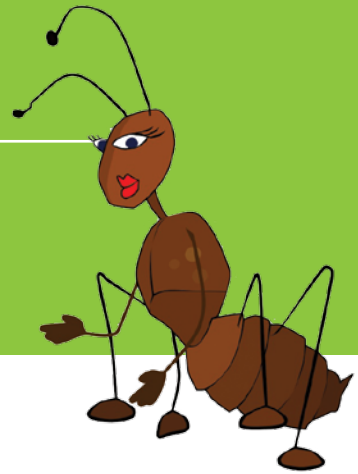
If your compost has formed a wet sludge then you need to add more brown materials, like scrunched up cereal boxes and similar cardboard packets such as cardboard egg boxes and kitchen roll middles. You can also add some shredded paper along with the cardboard. You may need to take out the contents and replace it, mixing up the wet sludgy contents with the brown materials. It will then start to compost correctly but take care to aerate it as frequently as you can.

Fruit flies

Waste fruit can encourage small black flies to your bin. These are called fruit flies. This is normal and you have not done anything wrong. If you want to reduce their numbers leave the lid off on a windy day and the flies will disperse.

Enjoy showing your children how to compost at school.

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Health and safety

Involving children in composting at school

If you wish to involve the children with filling the compost bin or using the compost on school garden projects etc you should be aware of the following health and safety considerations:

- Check area for hazards immediately before you allow children to approach the bin;
- Checks should be carried out by the school to ensure no child is at risk from an adverse allergic reaction when working with compost;
- Appropriate supervision ratio of adults to children;
- Discuss with the children the possible hazards of composting and how they might be avoided or reduced, to include:
 - gardening gloves should be worn when working with the compost;
 - children should wear appropriate footwear e.g. not opened-toed sandals;
 - do not eat or drink during the activity and also wash hands thoroughly after the activity;
 - any cuts should be covered before any composting activity;
 - garden tools used should be appropriate to the children's size and age and children should be trained in the safe use of all tools they will use.

We hope that the above information lets you compost easily, safely and successfully at school.

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Gardening gloves should always be worn when working with compost.

