



# How to become Composting Champions

## Why should we compost?

The pupils will find the whole experience very fascinating. Some may shriek 'yuk' at the beginning, but as they get used to the routine they will want to do it all the time.

To become a 'Compost Champion' the pupils will learn..

- how to take responsibility of their individual jobs,
- teamwork
- communication skills
- reliability to carry out their jobs each day

The pupils will learn the importance of composting and how this helps the environment in a wider sense.

Once pupils learn how to compost at school they can take this information home and make free compost to use in their garden, to add nutrients to the soil.



*This is Fun!*



*Its my job to collect the compost waste everyday*



*This is our compost bin*



# How to become Composting Champions

## How easy is it to compost?

If you get the conditions right composting will happen naturally, without many problems.

You will need to think carefully about where to put the compost bin.

During our compost 'set up' workshop we will explain to the pupils that the compost bin will need to be in an accessible place that is best sited on soil where there is good drainage.





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## Positioning your compost bin

There are a few things to consider before you locate your compost bin.

- A compost bin will work best when placed on bare soil or grass as this will help to speed up the composting process. Worms and micro-organisms can easily get into the bin and moisture can drain out.
- It is best to place the compost bin in a sunny spot in your school grounds as this will again speed up the composting process. However composting will still work in the shade, it will just take longer.
- You will need easy access to your compost bin so that you can get to it all year round.
- During the summer months you may have some fruit flies or wasps around the bin, so situate the bin away from the main building and playing areas.
- You may want to consider putting the compost bin out of view from the general public to avoid theft or vandalism.
- Keep in mind that where you put your first bin you may want to leave enough space to add a few more as the bins get full over the months.

A school of 200 pupils can compost over a tonne in a school year. For this size school expect to fill at least two compost bins.

It is a good idea to put a few twigs and scrunched up cardboard at the bottom of the compost bin before you begin to add any waste. This creates an encouraging environment for some welcome animals and will let the air move around the bin easily.





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## Things to remember

For composting to work effectively and efficiently you need to add both carbon-rich materials which are generally known as 'browns' and nitrogen-rich materials known as 'greens'. Brown carbon-rich materials are dry materials like paper, cardboard and leaves. The green nitrogen-rich materials include kitchen scraps and grass.

## Here is a list of green and browns you can add to your compost bins:

### Browns

- Dried leaves
- Small woody pruning's from the garden
- Cardboard
- Scrunched up paper
- Loo roll centres
- Kitchen towels
- Old straw
- Old bedding plants

### Greens

- Vegetable peelings
- Fruit scraps
- Tea bags and coffee grounds
- Grass clippings
- Young weeds and plants
- Cut flowers
- Soft hedge clippings
- Nettles
- Small animal waste (vegetarian)
- Hay and saw dust



**Don't add any cooked food, bread or meat.**



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It is probably best to get a Kitchen Caddy for each class or ensure that you collect the compostable waste easily and safely. The children can then put their fruit peelings in these caddies at break and lunchtimes and then at the end of the day, with a member of staff, the Compost Champion can go to the compost bin and empty out their waste. It will be a good idea to get a few of the older children to collect some shredded paper, paper towels, newspaper etc to put in with the 'green' waste to keep the mix 50:50. This can be collected from the school office.





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When making up the compost always remember to add a 50:50 mix of green and brown ingredients.

Try and add one caddy full of green waste and one caddy full of brown every time you visit the bin.

**Browns** = dry fibrous material with a low water content and **Greens** = soft, sappy materials with a high water content.



Brown Mix



The 'greens' rot down quickly and are very wet and are the main source of food, the 'browns' add structure and air to the mixture.



Green Mix



A mixture of both greens and browns provide the micro-organisms and other animals with a balanced diet. The micro-organisms break down the materials you compost by eating them. In order to live, the microbes need food, air, moisture and warmth. A 50:50 mix of greens and browns should provide the microbes with food and moisture. To get air into the mixture add scrunched up newspaper and egg boxes to make air pockets throughout the mixture or stick a broom handle into the mixture a few times and give it a wiggle to add air or dig the compost over with a garden fork. To ensure the microbes are warm enough, make sure you have situated the compost bin in a partially sunny area.



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## Problems you may encounter

Too much green material makes the compost heap slimy and smelly and too much brown makes the compost heap too dry. Either way the composting process will not work properly so get the mix right from the start.

School grounds usually include lots of grass areas and trees. Therefore you will no doubt have lots of grass clippings and leaves that you need to dispose of. These can be added to your compost bin but you need to do so carefully. Grass clippings are rich in nitrogen and they heat up very quickly in a compost bin. Add grass clippings in moderation with some 'browns' otherwise they can make a slimy, smelly heap. So always add grass clippings with some fibrous materials like scrunched up cardboard and shredded paper.

The composting process can take anything up to 12 months to complete. However this could differ depending on how well you have looked after your compost bin. If you have followed the instructions we have provided you in this pack, the composting process should have worked well and you should have some good compost to now use. However please do not forget to contact the Waste Education Officer, Page 10, if you are concerned in any way and we will assist you.





# How to become Composting Champions

## What to do with it when it is ready

When you have had your compost bin for a year, open the hatch at the bottom to have a look at the compost. You will know when the compost is ready for use as it will be dark brown in colour, crumbly and have an earthy smell. Do not worry if your compost does not look like the garden centre variety. It will probably be a little lumpy and may have some things that have not completely broken down, however it will still be effective to use. You can, if you wish, sieve your compost to make it finer for the children to use.





# How to become Composting Champions

## How to get it right. Frequently Asked Questions

### Why is our compost bin slimy and smelly?

This is due to you having added too much wet ingredients such as grass clippings and fruit peelings. Add more dry materials like shredded paper, straw and cardboard and mix this up well and this should help.

### Why is my compost bin too dry?

This is due to you having added too much dry ingredients such as paper, straw and cardboard. Add more wet ingredients like fruit peelings, some grass clippings and some water. In the summer months when it is very sunny and dry, you will need to add a watering can or two every week to ensure the compost remains working efficiently.

### Why is our compost bin attracting lots of little flies?

These are harmless fruit flies and they help to breakdown the waste in your compost bin. They are harmless but it is off-putting to open up the compost bin and get a face full of flies. To reduce their numbers, when you layer your ingredients, add the wet (green) ingredients first then add the brown (dry) ingredients on top. The flies will be less attracted to your bin as the smell from the green ingredients rotting down will not be so strong if covered over.



# How to become Composting Champions

## How to get it right.

### What happens over the school holidays?

Your compost should be fine over the holidays the only problems that could arise is it could get too dry due to dry weather. If the caretaker or site officer is on site during the holidays, perhaps you could arrange for them to add a watering can of water to the bin every week.

### How will we know when the compost is ready?

The finished compost will be the dark brown layer that will be at the bottom of the bin. It should look like dark brown soil and have an earthy smell. It still may contain some ingredients that have not fully composted down but you should still be able to dig the compost into your flower and vegetable beds.

**Remember, if you have any questions or queries, please do not hesitate to contact the Waste Education Officer and I will be more than happy to help.**

**I can visit your school and set up your bin with your eco or school council. I can also come and visit to present a school assembly and visit and perform an sos on your existing bin and see if it is behaving and help and suggest ways we can get you back on track with composting successfully.**

**Contact Heather Marden, Waste Education Officer**

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