

## Building a compost box

The following instructions will make a moveable, wooden compost box 75cm × 75cm × 75cm. It consists of identical interlocking sections which are stacked one on top of the other. This can be adjusted to suit your requirements and the materials available. Reclaimed timber is ideal, such as floorboards and pallets.

As the compost decomposes and decreases in volume, the top sections of the box can be taken off and used to start a new container.



Diagram 1

Keep the rain out with a wooden lid or a square of old carpet or polythene.

## Materials and equipment

To make **one** section of the box you will need:

- 2 × 75cm wooden boards, 7.5cm wide\* minimum 1.5cm thick.
  - 2 × 72cm wooden boards, 7.5cm wide\* minimum 1.5cm thick.
  - 4 wooden corner blocks, 5cm × 5cm x 5.5cm.
  - 20 of 3.6cm screws, size number 8
- 1 screwdriver, 1 drill and 1 saw.

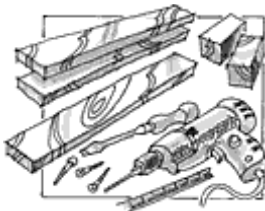


Diagram 2

A teacher's guide to making your own compost box and compost

Total materials for 10 sections

- 30m of 7.5cm × 1.5cm timber
  - 2.2m of 5 × 5cm timber
  - 220 of 3.6cm number 8 screws
  - Wider or slightly narrower boards may be used, as long as the size of the corner blocks is adjusted to suit. There is no need to keep the same width for each section if the timber available is variable.
- Length and thickness should be constant.**

## Building the box

1. Cut 2 boards, each 75cm long from the 7.5cm x 1.5cm timber.
2. Cut 2 boards, each 72cm long from the 7.5cm x 1.5cm timber.
3. Cut 4 lengths of 5.5cm from the 5cm × 5cm timber. These will make the corner blocks.
4. Take one of the two **72cm** boards and place it in position with a corner block at each end. The ends of the board should be flush with the blocks; the blocks should be positioned so that they project 2cm beyond the edge of the board, as shown in diagram 3
5. Hold the board in position on the blocks. Drill 3 holes, through the board and into the block below. Fasten with 3 screws.
6. Repeat steps 4 and 5 at the other end.
7. Now repeat steps 4-6 with the second shorter 72cm board. You will now have two end pieces with attached corner blocks.

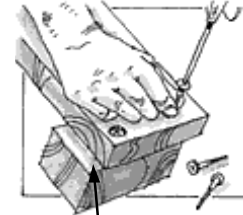


Diagram 3

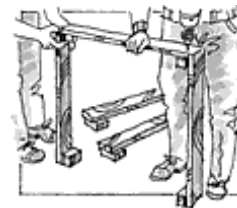


Diagram 4

8. Stand these two **72cm** boards on their ends approximately **75cm** apart with the protruding ends of the corner blocks away from you. Place a **75cm** board on top of the blocks to form a third side. Ensure that the ends of the **75cm** board are flush with the outer edges of the **72cm** boards.
9. Drill and screw each end of the 75cm board as in step 5. Use 2 screws only this time.
10. Turn the section over so that the unfinished side is uppermost. Place the second **75cm** board between the **72cm** boards as before. Position squarely and drill and screw as in step 9.

You have now completed the first section of your compost box. Continue making sections until you have completed the number you need.

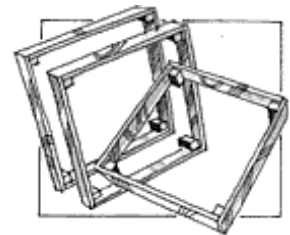


Diagram 5

## Further Reading

Make Compost and Watch Your Garden Grow - *HDRA leaflet*

Composting - *HDRA Step-by-Step booklet*

All about compost - *P. Pears, HDRA/Search Press*

Backyard Composting - *John Roulac, Green Books*

Mucking in - *The Community Composting pack, The Wildlife Trust*

## Making compost

### Cool Heap

1. Collect a batch of compost materials. Try to get enough to make a 30cm layer or more. Aim for a mix of soft and tough items. *If you have time complete hot step 2.*
2. Start filling the bin which should be on bare soil. Spread the ingredients out to the edges and firm down. Alternate soft and tough items. Unless items are already wet, water every 30-60cm.
3. Continue to fill the container as material become available. Items can be added individually, but a bigger batch is better. If you are only adding kitchen waste, it will be wet and need some dry material to balance it. Torn up newspaper and junk mail is ideal. *If you have time complete hot step 4.*
4. When the container is full—which it may never be as the contents will sink as it composts—or when you decide to—stop adding material. Either leave the compost to mature or go to step 5.
5. Remove the container, or everything from the container. If the lower layers have composted, use this on the garden. Mix everything else together well; add water if it is dry and dry material if it is soggy. Replace in the bin and leave to mature. This can take up to 12 months.

### Hot Heap

1. Gather enough material to fill your compost container in one go. Make sure that you have a mix of tough and soft materials.
2. Chop up tough items using shears or a sharp spade.
3. Mix ingredients together as much as possible before adding to the container. In particular mix items such as grass mowings, that tend to settle and exclude air, with more open items that tend to dry out. Fill the container, watering every 30-60cm.
4. Within a few days, the heap is likely to get hot to the touch. When it begins to cool down, or a week or two later, turn the heap. Remove everything from the container and mix it all up, trying to get the outside material to the inside. Add water if it is dry or dry material if it is soggy. Replace in the container.
5. The heap may well heat up again. Step 4 can be repeated several more times if you have the energy. When the compost no longer heats up leave it undisturbed to mature. This can take 3-6 months.

## What can I compost?

### Activators, quick to rot

Comfrey leaves  
Grass cuttings  
Poultry manures  
Young weeds



### Older, slower to rot

Fruit and veg scraps  
Teabags and coffee grounds  
Old straw and hay  
Vegetable plant remains  
Strawy manures  
Old flowers and bedding plants  
Young hedge clippings  
Soft prunings  
Perennial weeds (not roots)  
Gerbil, hamster and other vegetarian pet bedding  
Newspaper



### Very slow to rot

Autumn leaves  
Tough hedge clippings  
Woody prunings  
Sawdust and wood shavings



### Other compostable items

Wood ash  
Cardboard  
Paper towels, bags and packaging  
Cardboard tubes and egg boxes



### Best avoided

Meat and fish  
Perennial weed roots



### Do NOT compost

Coal and coke ash  
Cat and dog faeces  
Disposable nappies  
Glossy magazines



# Composting



A teacher's guide to  
making your own compost  
box and compost



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**Organic Gardens for Schools**

## Building a compost box

The following instructions will help you to make a moveable, wooden compost box 75 × 75 × 75cm. It consists of identical interlocking sections which are stacked one on top of the other. This can be adjusted to suit your requirements and the materials available. Reclaimed timber is ideal, such as floorboards and pallets.



As the compost decomposes and decreases in volume, the top sections of the box can be taken off and used to start a new container.

Diagram 1

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### Materials and equipment

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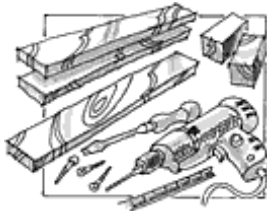


Diagram 2

- 4 wooden corner blocks, 5cm × 5cm x5.5cm.
- 20 of 3.6cm screws, size number 8
- 1 screwdriver, 1 drill and 1 saw.

Total materials for 10 sections

- 30m of 7.5cm × 1.5cm timber
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4. Take one of the two **72cm** boards and place it in position with a corner block at each end. The ends of the board should be flush with the blocks;

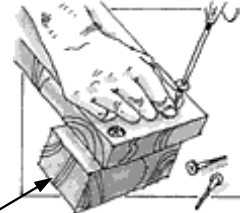


Diagram 3

the blocks should be positioned so that they project 2cm beyond the edge of the board, as shown in diagram 3.

5. Hold the board in position on the blocks. Drill 3 holes, through the board and into the block below. Fasten with 3 screws.
6. Repeat steps 4 and 5 at the other end.
7. Now repeat steps 4-6 with the second shorter **72cm** board. You will now have 2 end pieces with attached corner blocks.
8. Stand these 2 shorter boards on their ends approximately 75cm apart with the protruding ends of

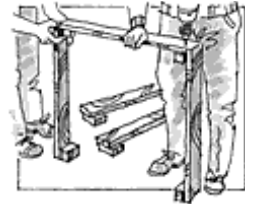


Diagram 4

the corner blocks away from you. Place a **75cm** board on top of the blocks to form a third side. Ensure that the ends of the **75cm** board are flush with the outer edges of the **72cm** boards.

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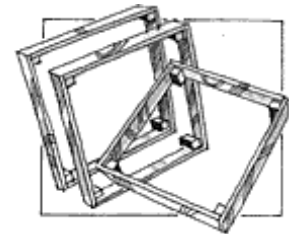


Diagram 5

10. Turn the section over so that the unfinished side is uppermost. Place the second **75cm** board between the 72cm boards

as before. Position squarely and drill and screw as in step 9.

You have now completed the first section of your compost box. Continue making sections until you have completed the number you need.

# What can I compost?

## Activators, quick to rot

- Comfrey leaves
- Grass cuttings
- Poultry manures



## Other compostable items

- Wood ash
- Cardboard
- Paper towels, bags and packaging crumpled up
- Cardboard tubes and egg boxes



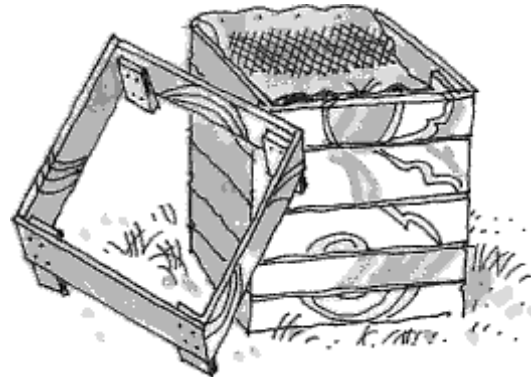
## Best avoided

- Meat and fish
- Perennial weed roots



## Older, slower to rot

- Fruit and veg scraps
- Teabags and coffee grounds
- Old straw and hay
- Vegetable plant remains
- Strawy manures
- Old flowers and bedding plants
- Young hedge clippings
- Soft prunings
- Perennial weeds (not roots)
- Gerbil, hamster and other vegetarian pet bedding
- Newspaper



## Very slow to rot

- Autumn leaves
- Tough hedge clippings
- Woody prunings
- Sawdust and wood shavings



## Do NOT compost

- Coal and coke ash
- Cat and dog faeces
- Disposable nappies
- Glossy magazines



# Composting



A student's guide to making your own compost box and compost



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