

## Your garden in May - composting

I must let you into a secret: I practice the art of black magic. Now before you start panicking, what I mean is the art and magic of turning garden and kitchen waste into lovely black organic matter to put on the garden. Yes, I am a composter.

In March's article I talked about the benefits of mulching your garden to keep the weeds out and the moisture in. And what better thing to use for a mulch than your own home-made compost.



The council often has offers for cheap compost bins, and with Compost Awareness Week coming up (6-12 May), they may be doing so again. Alternatively you can get wooden bins, or make your own from old pallets which is what I did.

Start by putting your compost bin on bare soil, so worms and other soil creatures that help make the compost can get in, and liquid can drain out.

The key thing is to get the right balance between nitrogen-rich ingredients (greens) and carbon-rich matter (browns). Browns include dried flowers, shredded paper and cardboard, crushed egg shells, straw, and shredded woody stems; greens include fresh grass cuttings, and kitchen waste such as uncooked fruit and vegetable peelings, teabags and

coffee grounds. Don't add meat, bones, fish, dairy products, or cooked food as it might attract rats.

Composting works best if you add a lot of materials at once. This builds up the temperature quickly and speeds up the process. Don't worry if you only have a small amount to start with though. You will still end up with compost but it might take longer. Chopping large items into small pieces will help.

Compost needs to be moist but not wet. Add water if it is too dry, or cover and add dry material if it is too wet.

The other crucial ingredient for good compost is air. Every now and then introduce air either by mixing with a garden fork, turning the compost from one bin to another, or adding more crunched up paper and card.

Your compost will be ready to use when it resembles dark soil and has a sweet, earthy smell. This usually takes between 6 – 12 months. The sense of satisfaction when you spread your own black gold on the garden is immense.

Composting is fun, it's environmentally friendly, it's good for your garden, and it's free! So come on, take up the art of black magic!