

## fact sheet



# The Quick Guide to Composting, Worm Farms and Bokashi

(or How to Halve Your Rubbish to Landfill)

Composting your food scraps through a compost bin, worm farm or bokashi bin will cut greenhouse gas emissions, mean less waste ends up in our landfill sites, create odourless products your garden and pot plants will love, and halve the amount of rubbish you put in your bin each week. Which means that once a fortnight, instead of going out in the dark and the rain, you can say “hell, the bin’s not full, I’ll put it out next week”.

### So why should I compost?

We covered the key points just above, but if you’re still not convinced, consider this: When you put your food scraps in the bin they get trucked off to landfill where they get buried with all that other waste and toxic stuff that we don’t know quite what to do with. We keep having to build more landfill sites. When it’s there, the food scraps tend to break down without oxygen, which creates methane, which is a very potent greenhouse gas. When you compost at home, besides avoiding the trucks and the landfill sites, you end up with much lower emissions. It’s worth doing even if you don’t have a garden. And if you do, composting won’t just make it happy, it will also make the soil hold water better and need less watering. Oh, and composting is easy.

### Should I go for a compost bin, worm farm or bokashi bin?

If you live in an apartment with no outdoor space, a bokashi bin is your best bet. This uses microbes to break down your food waste and doesn’t smell or make a mess, so you can keep it in your kitchen. But you will need to dispose of the bin’s contents when it’s full, preferably by finding someone who can use it in their compost heap, or bury it in their garden. Maybe a local community garden? If you haven’t got a garden but you have a bit of outdoor space, you could go for either a bokashi bin or a worm farm. Both will give you liquid you can dilute and feed to pot plants. If you have a garden then all three options are worth considering. Compost bins are good for creating soil you can use in the garden; worm farms can be used for cat and dog poo (see below). Bokashi bins require you to keep buying the bokashi mixture you sprinkle in them (it’s not expensive), but they don’t take up much space and will take meat scraps.





### Where do I get my bin?

Bokashi bins are available from some nurseries, organic and environment shops, and online. Compost bins and worm farms are both available from nurseries and hardware stores, but the better bet is usually to buy them through your local council, because they tend to subsidise the cost. You can also make your own! Worm farms can be made from plastic or polystyrene boxes, or an old bath. You'll need to buy the worms – they're not just ordinary garden worms. For compost, you can build a wooden structure to hold it, or stick three or four stakes in the ground and wrap chicken wire around it. You can even just make a compost heap, with no bin at all.

### So what goes in?

Keep a container or your kitchen bench. A kitchen caddy, or a four litre ice cream container with a lid works well. You might want to line it with newspaper – this stops the container itself getting too manky, and you can throw the newspaper in the compost/worm farm/bokashi. The short answer on what you can compost is all of your food scraps except meat, as well as your garden waste. Make sure you break big things up, and wet dry things like cardboard and dry leaves. The long answer is:

	Compost	Worm farm	Bokashi
Veggie scraps	✓	✓	✓
Citrus and onions	✓	Only a bit (too acidic)	✓
Meat scraps & bones	✗	✗	✓
Dairy	✓	✗	✓
Coffee grounds & tea bags	✓	Not too much	✓
Egg shells	✓	✓	✓
Garden waste	✓	✓	✓
Cat and dog poo	See below	See below	✗
Paper and cardboard (inc. pizza boxes!)	✓	✓	✓

### What about poo?

Compost heaps love poo, but only if it's from vegetarian animals, which means that cow, horse and chicken manure are in, and dog and cat poo are out. You can put cat and dog poo in worm farms, but it's probably worth having a separate worm farm just for this. Don't put the castings on plants you are going to eat, and don't put poo in the worm farm after your pet has taken medication, particularly worming medication – it kills worms.

### What do I need to do to keep it all happily ticking along?

#### Compost

The ingredients for a healthy compost are green things (which tend to be rich in nitrogen), like food scraps and lawn clippings and brown things (which tend to be rich in carbon), like newspaper, egg cartons, dried leaves, prunings, soil and hay. You need to add brown things whenever you empty your food scraps in, and to turn your heap (to get the air in) every few weeks. Well you don't really have to. If you don't your compost will become smelly and slimy (which is OK if it's at the end of the garden). It will emit methane, which isn't great, but it's better than not composting at all and sending more waste to landfill. Ideally your compost should be damp like a wrung out sponge. Your compost is ready to use on the garden when it looks and smells like soil.



### Worm farms

Once you've got your worms established (follow the instructions which come with the worm farm or the worms), you just need to regularly add food scraps. Not too much – if there is too much uneaten food left in the farm it will get smelly and can make your worms unhappy. The bottom of the farm will fill up with liquid which is very nutrient rich. Drain this off, dilute it 10 to 1 and put it on the garden. Every couple of months the tray in your worm farm will fill up with castings. Move the worms up to the next tray by letting them use up all the food in the castings tray, and then only adding food to the tray above. The castings can be used on the garden. Like a compost bin, worm farms should be as wet as a damp sponge. Worms don't like extremes of temperature, so in summer put your worm farm in a shady spot, and protect it from really hot days by putting a bottle of frozen water in the farm with the lid just open, so cold water trickles out as it melts. A wet hessian sack or wet carpet over the top can also help. If you live where the temperature tends to get below zero, keep your worms in a shed in winter, or in a sunny spot, or try covering them in an old carpet or polystyrene.

### Bokashi bins

Bokashi bins come with a bag of dry mixture, mostly bran, which has been fermented with "friendly bacteria". Every time you add food scraps to the bin, you need to sprinkle some of this over the top. There's a tap at the bottom of the bin, and you need to drain the liquid off as often as possible. The liquid can be diluted and used in the garden, or poured down the drain to stop the drain smelling. It's best to have two bins, so when one fills up you can leave it to ferment for a while and start using the other. But if you only have one, you don't have to leave it to ferment.

### Oh no, it's all going wrong!

It probably won't go wrong. But if it does, here are some tips to get you through.

#### Compost

*It's slimy and smelly.*

This is usually because you have too much "green" stuff in there – nitrogen rich things like food scraps. You need to add more "brown" stuff – carbon rich things like dried leaves, hay, newspaper and egg cartons. And mix it around a bit.

*There are ants, rats or mice in there*

These critters usually only hang out in your compost when it's too dry – add some water. Or if there are meat scraps in there. Each time you add veggie scraps you should cover them with "brown" things (leaves, soil, newspaper, etc.). If you're still getting mice and rats, you may need to switch to a compost bin which is well enclosed and has a wire mesh under it, so they can't get in.

#### Worm farms

*It's supposed to be damp like a wet sponge, and it isn't*

If it's too dry, add more food scraps and some water. If it's too wet, make sure you are draining the liquid out the bottom regularly.

*It's smelly*

You've got uneaten food in there. Stir around everything in the farm, and start feeding them less.

#### Bokashi bin

*It's smelly*

Make sure the lid is sealing and is being left on, that you're adding enough bokashi, and that you are draining the liquid out the bottom of your bin regularly.



A worm farm



Container on bench



A compost bin