## Solving Common Compost Problems

Why is my compost…

* **left with half-decomposed big lumps?**Adding smaller pieces to the bin should ensure that it all decomposes evenly. Avoid avocado seeds, pineapple tops, large twigs or woody items unless they can be crushed or chopped before adding. Always crush eggshells.
* **smelly?**This could be due to too much nitrogen-containing materials (green or wet stuff) and not enough carbon (brown or dry stuff). Adding more of the dry stuff in the form of crumpled newspaper, torn up egg cartons or dried autumn leaves will help. Generally, after a week of adding kitchen fruit and veg peelings, you will need to add 3 times the volume of dry stuff to get the balance right.
TURNING the contents will also help with minimising smells. Use a garden fork or special compost tool to aerate the heap at least weekly and this will accelerate the compost making.
* **taking SO long to do anything?**

This could be because:

* The contents could be too dry. *Add water, preferably with some high in nitrogen compost activator added at the same time (eg blood and bone, Dynamic Lifter, loads of coffee grounds).*
* The contents could be too wet and slimy. *See above for solution.*
* It is decomposing unevenly*. Turn the contents over to introduce air (oxygen) into the mix.*
* **crawling with ants and slaters?**

This means that the heap is too dry. Use a watering can to thoroughly wet the contents without saturating them. Turn the contents over so that the drier edges get wet evenly. Ants and slaters (and the many other insects that are in your compost) are not harmful but they do indicate that your compost will not decompoae rapidly enough.

* **plagued with rats/mice/blowflies/maggots?**

****Cooked and processed foods attract vermin and the heat from your compost makes a welcoming place for rats and mice to nest. Don’t add any cooked scraps, especially bread, cakes, cheeses, fish or meat. Rats and mice usually enter the bin by digging underneath, so fasten a piece of fine-meshed wire under the bin before filling it; or get a hungry cat! Alternatively, use a fully enclosed bin such as the Aerobin or any of the rotating bins (cooked scraps are OK in these).

**Compost Tea**Fill a large bucket (20 litres or more) to about half full with finished compost. Top up with water. Stir daily. After a week, take some out and strain the bits out of it so it doesn’t clog your watering can. Dilute to the colour of weak tea and use this as a liquid feed for fast growing vegetables. Keep topping up the original bucket with more water until the compost tea is too weak and then get some fresh compost in there.
If you have any old pantyhose or a hessian sack, fill this with the compost and dangle it into the bucket, just like a teabag!

**Compost in a Bag**Gather wet autumn leaves, fill up a plastic garbage bag and close the end. Leave it for a year and then use the resulting “leaf mulch” around young seedlings for a nutritious mulch around them. To speed up the process, shake a good handful of blood and bone through at the same time and put it where sunlight will heat the bag. Just make sure the contents are thoroughly wet at the start.

A good vegie garden requires regular top-ups with great soil conditioner and the BEST is your own home-made compost.