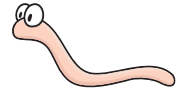


Gardeners

Worm farm



One of the best things you can do for your garden, and one of the cheapest, is to create your own compost. To many a seasoned gardener it is considered gold.

Compost does so many good things to a garden. It improves the structure of poor soils, such as the heavy clay substrate that is all too common in Whitehorse. Clay is made up of very fine, nutrient poor particles and is susceptible to all the problems that you don't want for good plant growth: soil compaction, water logging and poor drainage. Adding organic compost breaks up the clay particles, buffers the pH back to neutral, improves water holding capabilities and drainage.

Compost adds important nutrients and microbes to the soil that give your plants the best opportunity to thrive and survive. As a result, plants are healthier and less susceptible to pests and disease. Flowering and fruiting is optimised.

There are several different ways to create your own compost:

Compost bin

Any suitable bottomless container can be made into a compost bin or you can purchase one from your local nursery or hardware store.



As with compost bins there are commercially available worm farming systems and you can simply buy a box of worms to populate your farm. This system is smaller in size than a compost bin and produces two by-products: worm castings and worm juice, both of which can be applied to the garden to give excellent results.

Bokashi bucket

The Bokashi bucket is a clever composting system that can sit on your kitchen bench. Food scraps are entered into the bucket and a special grain mix is used to ferment the food into a solid product which can be dug into the ground and a liquid which can be used as a fertiliser. Because this system is relatively small and the container is sealed to prevent odours they are a great option for a flat or house with limited space.



What can go in compost?

In a compost bin you need to have a good mix of carbon-rich and nitrogen-rich materials, in alternating layers of 3-10cm. Examples of carbon-rich materials include dry leaves, newspaper, straw, shredded paper, egg cartons and dried grass clippings. Examples of nitrogen-rich materials include green plant material, vegetable scraps and manures.

Gold



by Noni Young

Worms love fruit and vegetable scraps, coffee grounds, tea bags, wet cardboard, egg shells and vacuum cleaner dust. They don't like meat scraps, onions, chilli or citrus.

The Bokashi bucket system will accept almost anything including meat scraps which you can't put in a traditional compost bin or worm farm.

Whichever approach you choose, It is best to avoid animal waste, bulbous weeds and diseased plants in compost. Bleached and/or glossy office paper should also be avoided.

It was reported in 2007 that Whitehorse residents were sending more than 20,000 tonnes of food scraps and garden waste to landfill each year¹. With just a bit of elbow grease to get you started you could be producing some 'gardeners gold' for your garden and reducing landfill at the same time. Your garden will reap the rewards and you will save by not having to buy commercial fertilisers, soil improvers and wetting agents. You may also be eligible for a rebate on the purchase of the composting system. Check your local water company website for details.

¹City of Whitehorse Sustainable Living Guide, Printed 2007

Get composting and reap the rewards

Noni Young, Horticulturalist and Garden Designer
www.noniyoung.com.au