



*Basic* guide  
*to composting*  
*at home in* Lanzarote



CABILDO DE LANZAROTE



## 2. Guide to composting at home

**W**aste doesn't exist in nature. Everything produced by natural ecosystems is transformed, recycled and put to good use. Materials are thus used and reused within the organic cycle. Thanks to the work of millions of decomposing organisms and their interaction with water and solar energy, the elements that make up organic matter are constantly recycled.

Rubbish is a human concept whereby as soon as we don't know what to do with something, we automatically hasten to get rid of it. We should however take a lesson from Nature: all organic matter has value!



### *How much organic waste do we produce?*

In Lanzarote we generate around 1.4kg of waste per person per day. Between 40% and 50% of this is organic material, comprising food waste, plant cuttings, etc.



### *How can we describe compost?*

- Dark brown colour, like woodland soil
- Pleasant smell of damp earth
- Smooth texture and slightly damp

# What is composting?



Home composting is a process that imitates natural systems in a controlled and accelerated manner. Composting enables us to decompose our vegetable waste in a clean and easy way, producing an ecological fertiliser.



# How is compost made?

Compost is made by a great variety of decomposing organisms. Their job is to eat and break down organic matter. Working to achieve this are millions of bacteria, fungi, insects and other invertebrates that will make their way from the soil into your compost bin. We can spot woodlice, earwigs, beetles, geckos and springtails – a great opportunity to learn more about these creatures and their marvellous ecosystem.

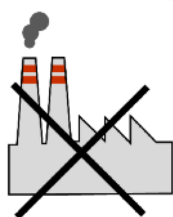
# How to start?



Your mission is to maintain optimum conditions in the compost bin in order to help the decomposers to their job. Follow the ABC of composting:

- A. ADD VEGETABLE WASTE**
- B. BLEND AND AERATE**
- C. CONTROL HUMIDITY**

# The benefits of composting at home



01

## PRODUCING LESS RUBBISH – AND ITS IMPACT ON THE ENVIRONMENT

Composting can reduce up to 40% of the rubbish we produce, thus easing the burden and costs involved in rubbish removal and treatment. This way we can help save energy and lessen the environmental impact of our rubbish.



02

## COMPLETING THE ORGANIC CYCLE

Composting is a simple process with a minimal cost, creating a product that can be used in the garden or plant pots saving the need for chemical fertilisers, pesticides and weed-killer. All without having to leave the house!



03

## MAKING OUR OWN FERTILISER

Compost is a natural and ecological product which is rich in nutrients, assuring vitality in our plants. Full of life, it helps improve the health and structure of our soil.



# *What do we need to start composting?*



## *A compost bin*

Very straightforward, this is basically an empty box with a lid and plenty of holes to allow for aeration. These can be bought or made at home using old pallets, for example.



## *Other tools*

For making compost, it is also advisable to have the following:

- A watering can
- Secateurs or pruning shears
- Gloves
- Sieve
- Aerator

# What sort of materials can we use to make compost?



*Dry/brown component: slow decomposition*

*Green/wet component: rapid decomposition*

- Dry leaves
- Garden cuttings (in small pieces)
- Egg and nut shells
- Unprinted paper or cardboard
- Straw or dry vegetables

- Fruit waste
- Vegetable waste
- Green leaves
- Animal manure (herbivores only)
- Used coffee filters and tea bags

# What can't we use?



- Non-biodegradable materials (glass, plastic, metals, etc.)
- Meat, fish or dairy products
- Oil
- Pet faecal matter or nappies
- Printed paper
- House cleaning waste
- Citric fruit waste (or only in small proportions)

# Let's get to it!

## Where should we put our compost bin?

The best place is somewhere sheltered from the wind, that receives both sun and shade. The shade will help retain humidity and the sun's heat will aid the process.

The base needs to be in contact with the soil in order to allow for the decomposing organisms to access the contents. Placing the container on gravel or cement will significantly hinder the process.

## The first time we fill the compost bin...

When we start composting, it is best to only half-fill the container, following the layering guide below. This will help initiate the process:

### OPTIONAL

Manure, soil or compost. This will accelerate the process.

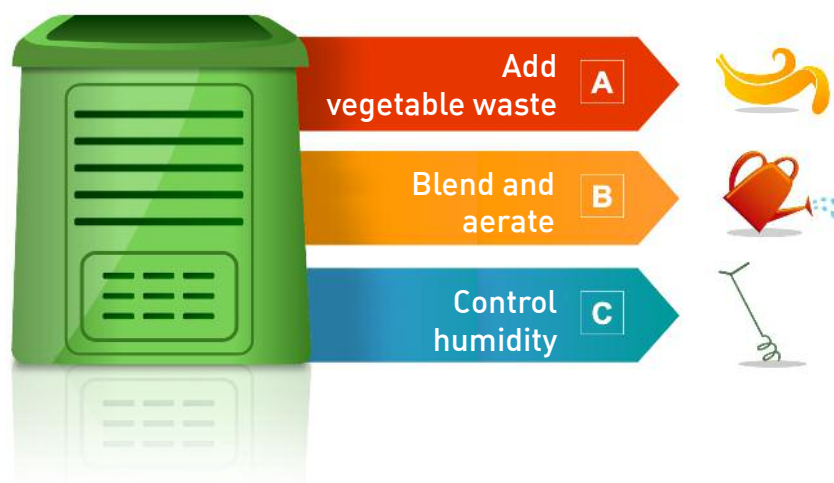
The top sections are made of alternative layers of wet and dry material, giving a good mixture for the start of the process.



It is advisable for the top layer to be made up of dry leaves or compost, to keep flies and mosquitos away.

The first time we fill the compost bin, the bottom layer is best made up of dry material such as twigs or leaves. This will allow for good aeration and drainage during the first few weeks.

# Making compost - the ABC of composting



## **A** Add vegetable waste

### What type?

Add the vegetable waste described above; both kitchen scraps and garden cuttings.



### How much?

Compost bins are designed to take all household and garden vegetable waste, the volume of which will diminish with time, leaving enough room for more. An optimum mix is two-parts green matter (fruit and veg), contributing humidity and nitrogen and one-part brown/dry matter (leaves, branches, etc.), providing structure, aeration and carbon.

### How?

The waste needs no further treatment before adding to the composter. Just remember to cut up branches and fibrous material into small pieces to facilitate decomposition. By covering wet matter with dry leaves or compost, you will avoid attracting flies and mosquitoes.



# Making compost - the ABC of composting



## **B** Blend and aerate

Decomposing organisms are aerobic, i.e. they breathe oxygen like us and so we need to ensure that the composter receives enough air. To achieve this, churn the contents either with a stick – or more effectively with an aerator. Blending the different layers of matter will both avoid bad smells and help accelerate the process.



## **C** Control humidity

Decomposing organisms live in damp environments, so when necessary, we need to add water to maintain sufficient moisture in the composter – but equally avoid waterlogged or wet contents or so as not to impede their work.



## *The result - obtaining your compost. Sieving and storing.*

With an average annual temperature of 21°C, Lanzarote's dry climate enables compost to be made quickly and continuously throughout the year. If managed and supervised correctly, compost can be created from vegetable remains in just four months.

At the end of the process, the resulting compost will have reduced the material to a ¼ of its original volume.

Small amounts of compost can be removed via the gate at the bottom of the container; the other alternative is to empty the bin and sieve the contents. Coarser elements that have not yet fully decomposed can be returned to complete the process. The fine, sieved product is compost, ready for use.

To store compost, use a cloth bag or any other breathable container and keep in a dry location out of the sun.

### POSSIBLE ISSUES: PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

If you follow the guidelines, composting is easy and doesn't generally create any problems. Occasionally however, some issues might arise – but these are easy to solve:

PROBLEM	CAUSE	SOLUTION
The contents remain dry and don't seem to decompose	Too dry	Water the compost to add humidity and add wet content
Low temperature and slow activity	Not enough volume	Add more wet and dry material until the container is more than half-full
The compost looks mulchy or waterlogged	Too much humidity	Mix and aerate, add more dry material and don't water for a few days
Rotten smells	Material too compacted Not enough air/oxygenation	Mix and aerate, add more dry material and don't water for a few days
The compost bin is attracting flies and mosquitoes	Fruit and vegetable waste too accessible	Cover fruit and veg waste with a layer of dry matter or compost
Presence of ants or other undesirables	The compost is dry and needs mixing	To avoid this in the future, water and thoroughly mix the compost on a regular basis
White layers forming in the composter	Fungal growth	No action needed; these are beneficial

# Uses for compost



- ***In the vegetable patch:***

- A. As a means to improve soil structure (1-3 Kg/m<sup>2</sup>).
- B. As a fertiliser: mix with soil when planting. It is also an ideal fertiliser for fruit trees.

- ***In the garden***

- A. As a fertiliser for all types of flowers and bushes.
- B. As a substrate for seeds or repotting.

- ***In the house,*** for pot plants.

- ***In seedbeds.*** Compost has a high capacity for stimulating germination.

- ***When watering.*** Make a compost “tea” by diluting 1kg of compost in a cloth “tea bag” in  $\frac{3}{4}$  of cold water and allowing it to seep overnight.



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