

## **Ballys Patch Compost Information Feb 2016**

At the patch we practice hot composting, which simply means that when we make a new batch of compost, we aim to build it in a way that will break down the materials rapidly to produce fertile humus.

By creating the right environment, the microbes which do all the work multiply rapidly and go to work decomposing the material. This generates heat which helps accelerate the process and cooks any seed in the material, eliminating weed problems.

We aren't scientists and most home recyclers and gardeners are simply interested in the end result being humus rich, fertile compost that will condition soil and support productive plant growth.

### ***The Recipe***

Don't get too hung up on quantities rather it is more important to get the overall mix right.

### ***Ingredients:***

Green materials (nitrogen), 20 to 30% (grass clippings, green plant material, lucerne hay, coffee grinds, fruit and vegetable scraps.

Brown materials (carbon), 70 - 80% (dry plant material e.g. leaves, straw, dry pruning etc)

### ***Additives***

*Manures* add nitrogen and feed the microbes. We use pelletised chicken manure. Other manures (sheep, cattle, chicken, horse and pig) are fine but please take care when handling them. If you are unsure about handling manures do some research before you do anything. Also, blood and bone is a highly concentrated fertiliser additive which works well in compost.

*Sugars* provide an immediate source of food for microbes and accelerate their growth. We use molasses, which you can buy from pet food stores. Add about 3, 9 ltr watering cans of molasses water to one cubic metre of mixed materials. Apply as you build.

*Lime*, is added to help neutralise (sometimes called sweetening) the compost (reduces acidity).

### ***The Process***

This is where the fun begins.

#### **Preparation**

Manures - follow the safety instructions on the bag. We like to open the bag of pelletised chicken manure and let it stand in the open air for a while before it's used - say 10 minutes.

Sugars - into a 9 ltr watering can add a slurp of molasses about 2 tablespoons or so. Then add some water (in Winter it helps to use warmish water). Swirl until the molasses has dissolved into the water (20 or 30 seconds). Fill the watering can.

Green and Brown material - we store them separately.

#### **The Mix**

Load the green and brown material into the compost bay.

To one part green add 4 parts brown. If the brown material is very dry and woody, reduce the quantity to 3 parts.

Add molasses water as you go and add plain water to create a moist mix of materials. Moist meaning that it will lightly stick together when squeezed in your hand. It is essential to not over water.

About three to four times during the process add the manure (about 1 ltr each time) and a hand full of garden lime (add water to soften the manure and mix the lime) - Note: only use garden lime and not builders lime which has a different chemical composition.

While not always necessary, fluffing the pile as it is built helps mix all the goodies together. Just use a garden fork to lift or toss the material around a bit.

Give it all 2 more drinks of plain water i.e. 2, 9 ltr water cans.

Add a cover to the top when you are finished, this can be anything really e.g. hessian, plastic old jute bags etc.

In a few days the material should start to become quite hot. Really good mixes will generate quite a lot of steam.

After 2 or 3 weeks we turn the compost, by forking it from one bay to another. This aerates the mix (the microbes are aerobic and need air to survive). This step is repeated again in another few weeks.

After a couple of months the compost should be ready for use or storage.

Resource Links:

Wollongong City Council Fact Sheet:

<http://www.wollongong.nsw.gov.au/customerserviceonline/factsheet/Factsheets/Composting.pdf>

Gardening Australia Fact Sheets:

<http://www.abc.net.au/gardening/stories/s2683832.htm>

<http://www.abc.net.au/gardening/stories/s4210405.htm>