

Compelling reasons to compost

You might think of your landscaped grounds as environmentally friendly, but send the lawn and plant clippings off to landfill and the result will be the generation of the greenhouse gas, methane.

Unfortunately, organic material, including garden organics, makes up 3 per cent of all commercial and industrial waste that ends up in landfill¹. Here the garden waste decomposes without oxygen to produce methane. As a harmful to the environment greenhouse gas, methane is 25 times more potent than carbon dioxide.

A far better way to deal with leftover garden organic material is to compost it so that decomposes in a way that benefits the environment.

Garden organics includes bark, leaves, twigs and other prunings as well as lawn clippings from landscaped areas.



Photo: Phil Molyneux

The benefits of compost

Compost, made from garden organics can be applied to soil to:

- improve gardens and crop productivity
- reduce reliance on chemical fertilisers, pesticides, fungicides and herbicides
- increase the stock of soil carbon
- contribute to soil health by adding organic matter and nutrients
- improve water efficiency and water savings
- reduce wind and water erosion damage
- save creeks and rivers from the problems of nutrient run-off.

Compost can be used to make soil conditioner. This is mostly used in manufactured soil and saves mining of river banks. Soil conditioner can also be found in potting mixes and general urban landscaping products.

Simple ways to cut garden organics costs

Think in terms of the waste hierarchy. How can you avoid, reduce, reuse or recycle garden organics?

- Avoid** → Do we need it?
- Reduce** → Do we need so much?
- Reuse** → Can we use it again?
- Recycle** → Can someone else use it or convert it into something new?



AVOID

Think about landscape design and choose plants that require minimal inputs, such as water and fertiliser, and do not generate significant waste, for example from deciduous leaves falling in autumn.

Avoid unnecessary plant deaths by planting native plants that are adapted to Australian conditions. These often require no additional watering and minimum or no fertiliser. When selecting pot plants, consider using grass trees, succulents or bromeliads as an alternative to plants that shed leaves.

In landscaped areas, do not dispose of dead leaves and fallen bark, but use as mulch or use in compost.



REDUCE

Try a mulch mowing method for grassed areas. This deposits grass clippings on the lawn so they break down and fertilise the soil.

Prune ornamental plants and hedges only when necessary, in order to reduce the amount of garden organics that will need to be managed.



REUSE

Start a simple compost system. Refer to the 'Easy Guide to Composting'² for simple tips on setting up and maintaining a compost bin. Use your compost in pot plants or the garden.

Mulch plants with clippings, dead leaves and fallen bark collected on site. If your garden generates large quantities of material, consider getting a mulching machine.

If you produce only a small amount of garden organics, consider sharing a compost system with a neighbouring business.



RECYCLE

If you cannot have your own compost bin, collect garden organics for offsite recycling. Visit BusinessRecycling.com.au and find a recycling service provider in your area.

Learn which materials can be accepted through your contractor's recycling system. Ask the contractor for staff training signs and innovative systems. Try to negotiate a way of working together, so you get a reduced charge for pick up.

Here are some more tips:

- Be careful to avoid adding contaminants to garden organics, such as plastic, steel, aluminium, glass, dog or cat manure.
- Make sure your garden maintenance contractors follow your recycling program and that they sort garden organics from other material before composting.

Your business can help the environment by recycling garden organics.

² DECCW 'Easy Guide to Composting', viewed 18 October (2010). <http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/households/EasyCompost.htm>

For further information

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