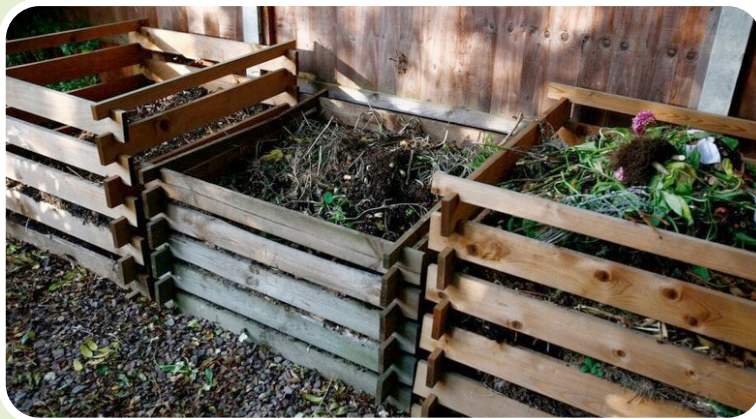


WILD YOUR SPACE

Wild your school
Rewild your children



Learning Opportunities

As always – every garden activity that you undertake is a potential learning opportunity, and composting is no different. Composting is very much a natural process, and we firmly believe that children need to learn about natural processes to begin to understand why people should be working hand in hand with nature for our mutual benefit.

If you need any further information or assistance with learning ideas, then **Bright Green Nature** are here to help.

Composting

Composting is nature's way of turning waste back into nourishment for plants and animals. It happens all around us - in the woods, fields and parks and it can happen in your school garden too. It's especially important if routine maintenance (such a cutting grass – if you must!, and sweeping up leaves) is creating piles of natural materials with nowhere to go. Note that random piles of cuttings and leaves in your gardens will create unnatural nutrient rich areas where dominant plants, such as stinging nettles, will take hold and can prove difficult to control.

When considering nature restoration projects at your school, it is important to understand what works best, and surprisingly - soil quality does not often need to be improved for the native plants that we recommend. In fact wildflowers thrive best on depleted soils. So, compost is rarely a requirement, although it can be useful where your only option is to plant in planters, or if you plant to grow vegetables. So, from a nature restoration

point of view, compost heaps are often just about managing any garden waste in a responsible (and educational) manner.

Composting happens when small organisms such as harmless bacteria, enzymes and fungi are given a chance to 'eat' organic waste. This process breaks down the waste and changes its structure so that plants and trees can extract nourishment from it. Also, the waste produced by them, and by worms in the compost heap, increases the nutritional value.

There are several ways of making compost, but it's a simple process. It can easily manage itself, but with a bit of help from you, the process is faster and the end product better.

The ingredients of good composting are simple: organic materials, air and water. The materials used to make compost should be a balanced mix of wet and dry, woody and sappy and should provide the right ratio of nourishment. In practice, that means that all your fruit and vegetable waste and most of your garden waste is suitable. To create the right balance, you should aim for a 50:50 ratio of greens, for example food waste, and browns, for example, cardboard, dried leaves and sticks (only using the smallest

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of sticks, and putting larger sticks in your Brash Hedge if you have one). Remember – no burning please!

Microbes need air like any other organism, so it's important to turn the compost heap regularly to let air in. Water is important too, as many bacteria and other organisms in the heap can't do their job if it's too dry. Moisture also helps regulate the temperature of the heap, ensuring the most efficient breakdown process. You can test the moisture content of your compost by picking up a handful and then squeeze it. If water comes out of the compost, it's too wet. If the compost falls apart in your hand, it's too dry.

The composting process takes from a few months to two years depending on how you manage the heap, which materials you add and the conditions. A heap turned every week or so and managed under all the right conditions may compost in a few



months. An unturned heap will often take about six months to two years to fully compost. If you only have space for one compost heap, then turning it regularly will be more important. If you have space for two or three compost heaps side by side (see image above), then you can sit back and let nature take its course. Please note that – if you don't have space for a composting heap, or anything to put on one, then Bright Green Nature can normally supply FREE COMPOST if this is something that you do require – whilst remembering that most native plants are best in nutrient poor soil.

There are many videos available on line, such as this short one from the Royal Horticultural Society - How to compost - Grow at Home:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RKl2hJdMqfg&t=12s>

Interesting Facts about compost heaps

- They create their own heat – often getting hot (not just warm). This can be a source of fascination to children, especially in the colder months.
- Compost and soil are not dead – they are living things.
- There are more microbes in a teaspoonful of compost than there are humans living on this planet.
- Worms are the heroes of the compost heap, and work (ok, eat) constantly. If you are looking for worms (for a wormery perhaps), you know where to find them.
- Compost traps carbon and helps us to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions.
- Composting has been taking place for thousands of years and started in several ancient cultures.



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