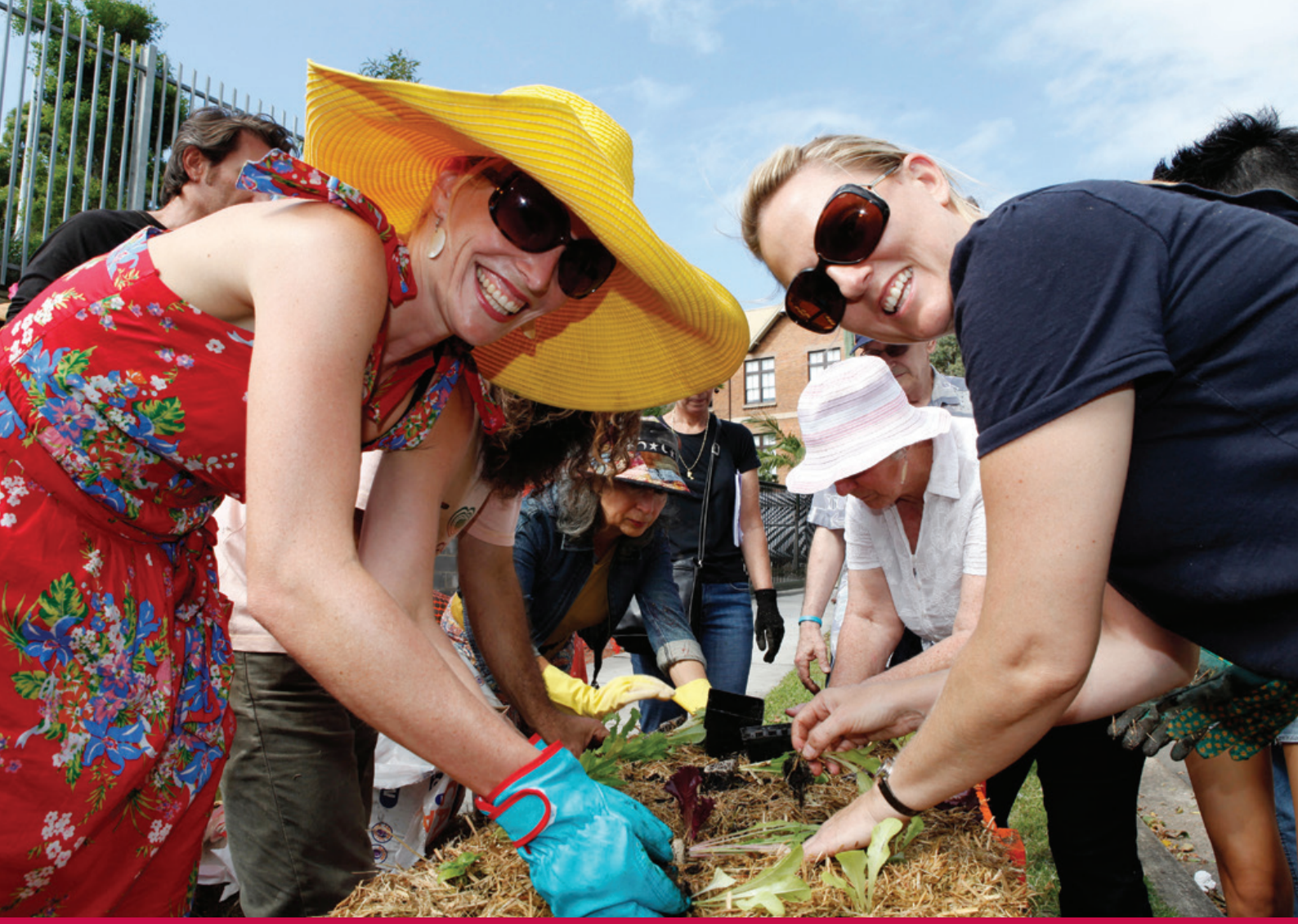


Sydney2030/Green/Global/Connected

CITY OF SYDNEY

Community Composting Guidelines

May 2014

city of villages

contents

01 Community composting

A guide to successful composting in a public space or on private land

Composting is a great way to use food waste that may otherwise go to landfill. The compost you create is good for the soil and very handy when growing your own food.

Your project could be a compost bin in a community garden, a shared worm farm in an apartment block or school, or perhaps a compost system used by a group of businesses.

Whatever composting system you choose, these guidelines will help make your project a success.

Where you can compost

The City works with community gardeners to establish composting and worm farms in public gardens and small parks.

We also encourage residents to install compost bins or worm farms in their home or strata block, and offer free workshops, and free worm farms and compost bins.

If there is enough community interest, we may trial compost facilities in parks and footpath verge gardens.

For successful community composting, you need:

– Committed caretakers to regularly maintain and manage the compost or worm farm;

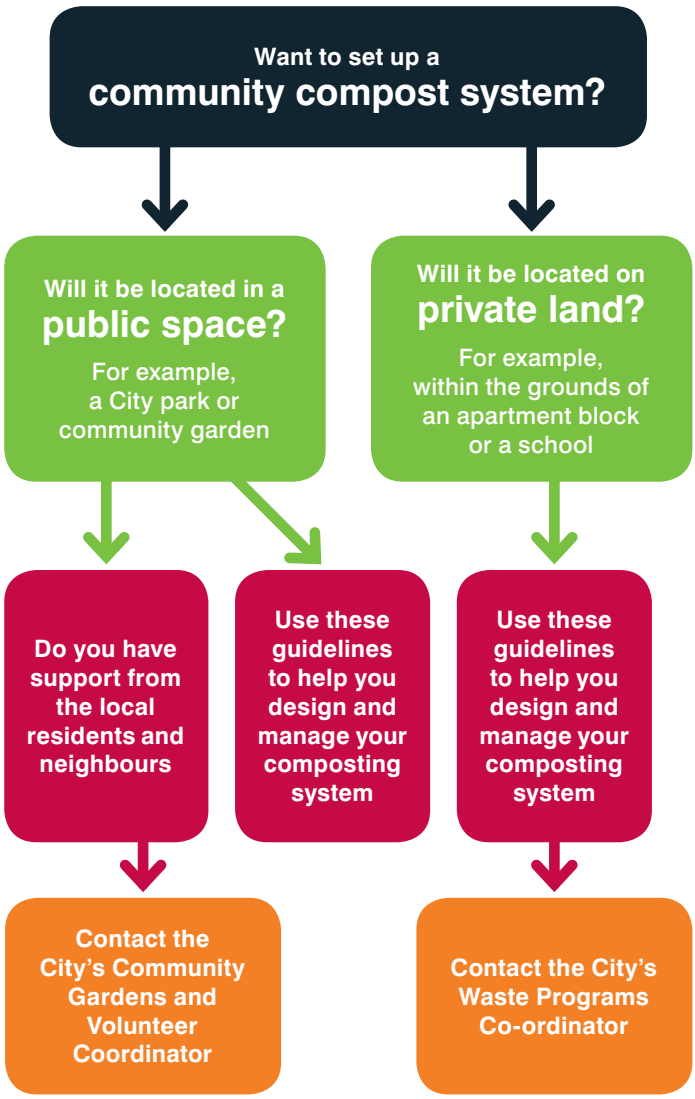
– The right system for your needs;

– Knowledge of how to manage the compost system or worm farm;

– A destination for the ready compost or worm tea, ideally a garden for local residents;

– Community support for, and involvement with, the composting system.

The approval process for community composting



01 Community composting

Contact us first

Contact us as early as possible to let us know about your project idea.

If your composting or worm farm project is in a public space, such as a park or community garden, talk to the Community Gardens and Volunteer Coordinator.

If your project is on private land, contact the City's Waste Programs Co-ordinator.

Call us on 02 9265 9333 or www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au

Choose a compost or worm farm system

Every compost system is unique, and its success depends on how it is managed.

When selecting an appropriate composting system, consider:

– Does the site or suburb have issues with vermin?

– Will the compost system be on sealed or permeable ground?

– How many people are expected to put food waste in the composting system?

– Is it easy for compost users to deposit food, add dry materials and remove ready compost?

Develop a plan of management

Before setting up a community composting project in a public space, you need to show us a plan of management.

Your management plan will need to detail:

Roles and responsibilities;

The type of compost system you will use;

A roster for maintaining the compost, such as turning and aerating, adding wet/dry materials, and removing ready compost;

A process for ensuring compost is only removed when ready;

Training and induction for new caretakers and compost users;

Community consultation and signs saying who can use the system and how;

Where you will store materials, tools and water;

An approach to controlling vermin;

A first aid kit;

Health and safety inductions for all volunteers;

Public liability insurance or be a part of the City's Greening volunteer insurance

Funding sources for infrastructure, tools, signs and other materials;

Techniques for recording the results of your project, including how much food waste goes into the system, how much compost it produces, and how many people are involved;

A plan to manage any contamination, litter and illegal dumping;

A destination for the ready compost;

A removal strategy for the system.

Decide who will use the system

Community composting can be popular, and systems in public places are likely to have more users than caretakers.

You will need to ensure the system has enough caretakers and does not become overloaded.

Questions to consider:

– Will all users be required to participate in training so they know how the system works and how to use it correctly?

– Are businesses allowed to contribute?

– Should food waste from businesses be limited to that collected by compost caretakers only?

– If you decide to limit who can deposit materials into the system, how will you ensure this is clearly communicated?

Talk to your local community

The last thing you want is to put in lots of work to set-up a system, and then have to remove it because locals don't want it there. Talking to nearby neighbours and businesses is vital. Door knock or invite locals to a meeting, listen to their points of view, address any concerns and get them to sign-on their support for your project.

Define roles and responsibilities

For a healthy composting system you need a group of committed caretakers.

Your management plan should detail how many people are involved and their roles. You'll also need a roster to share the main duties.

Questions to consider:

– How many compost caretakers do you need?

– Will users be required to bring dry materials along with their food scraps, or will these be supplied in a bin next to the compost?

– Who is in charge of ongoing maintenance – a group, an individual, or all users?

– What are the key roles and responsibilities?

– Will you have a roster to take care of the system?

– How many people will use the system?

– What will happen if a key member leaves?

– How will everyone communicate – email, facebook group, a logbook or another means?

Aspects that need regular attention:

– Daily checks for any issues or vandalism;

– Weekly turning for aeration;

– Adding moisture or dry materials;

– Removing ready compost; and

– Training and engaging users to use the system correctly.

Organise training

Regular training for key compost caretakers and newcomers will help keep your compost in top shape. The City's Community Gardens and Volunteer Coordinator can provide training on composting for community gardeners and volunteer groups. We also run regular workshops through our **Green Villages** program. You may want to organise your own training. You may also be eligible for one of our **matching grants**.

Questions to consider:

– Will you offer training and to whom?

– Who will run training and how often?

– What will be covered in the training?

– Who will have to attend training – just the compost caretakers? What about those who use the bins but aren't involved in maintenance?

– Will training be free or will you need to charge or apply for grant funds?

Choosing a good location

Compost systems and worm farms should be at least one metre away from neighbouring properties and the base of existing trees.

Worms need warmth and moisture to survive. Place worm farms in the shade in summer and in a sunny location in winter.

01 Community composting

Sourcing and storing materials

Materials you may need to store nearby include compost turners, dry materials, garden tools and pest control materials. Depending on your situation you may have a shed you could access on a resident's property. If not, you will need to consider other options such as a lockable tool box – perhaps this could also function as a seat?

Keep your system pest-free

A well-managed compost system should not have problems with vermin, smells or flies. The trick is keeping on top of the 50:50 green to brown ratio throughout the year! You'll learn more about how this works in any training you attend.

Compost is a living system teeming with life in all shapes and sizes, including bacteria, worms, fungi and micro-organisms. These guys do the bulk of the work.

Don't be alarmed when you find worms, snails or slugs and soldier fly larvae living in the compost or under the lid. They can help with the composting process.

If your compost system gets too damp, then the system can become acidic and anaerobic. This leads to excessive flies, offensive smells and cockroaches.

Ideally, you want to use pesticides only as a last resort. Try to get the system working by managing the input materials, blocking any gaps where vermin can enter, and deterring pests with natural substances like eucalyptus oil.

If your worm farm smells, there may be a build-up of food that is going mouldy and encouraging vermin. Worms have small mouths, so cut up the food into small pieces.

The following table sets out the issues that you may experience and some helpful solutions.

Create clear signs

Clear attractive signs are essential for getting people involved, spelling out the dos and don'ts for users, and for providing contact details.

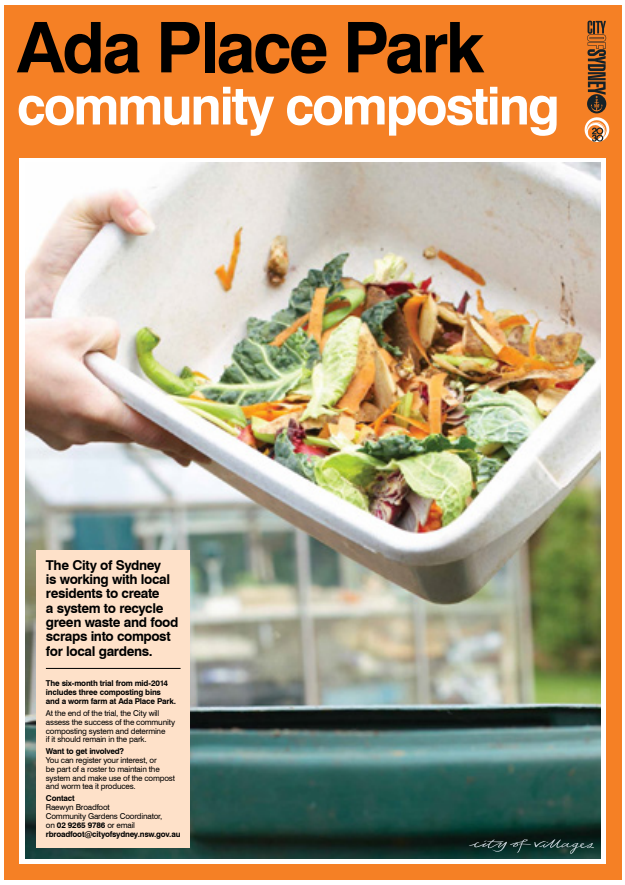
Instructions on how to use the system should be really clear and easy to understand. Pictures help!

Example instructions:

Step 1 Add your food scraps.

Step 2 Add an equal amount of dry material.

Step 3 Put the lid back on securely. See you again soon!



If you have **several compost bins**, then you may want to label each bin depending on available space. The bins in Peace Park are each labelled for a day of the week (Monday to Sunday) to ensure an even spread of materials. We suggest starting small, with up to three compost bins. You may also choose to have a **dry materials bin** – this will need a label too.

Compost bins – Mission Australia – Rooftop Garden

Gather data about your system

Collecting data is really useful to help show the success of your compost system. Such data can help interest potential funders, create good news stories in local media and help you keep track of what your project is achieving.

You could record information on:

– The number of caretakers;

– How many people use the system;

– The amount of food waste and dry materials diverted from landfill;

– The amount of compost produced; and

– The number of gardens that benefit from the compost.

Take out public liability insurance

You need insurance in case you hurt someone while undertaking compost or worm farm-related tasks.

All community composting and worm farm projects must have public liability insurance. You can obtain a policy for yourself, or another organisation may agree to cover you. The City offers public liability insurance cover to its volunteers. The City will ensure all volunteers are inducted and aware of their health and safety whilst working onsite. If you apply for a grant to fund the project, public liability can be included under certain conditions.

Obtain funding for tools, signs and materials

The City's **matching grants** program supports groups to purchase materials or supplies to help create projects that bring the community together.

The grants 'match' contributions made by the community with up to $10,000 cash or in-kind support, such as the waiver of venue hire fees for City venues.

The program matches volunteer time or your 'community contribution'. This can include time taken to identify, plan and begin projects. Volunteer time is matched at the rate of $20 per hour and professional services at $75 per hour.

Maintain your composting system properly

The City can remove or relocate any facilities which are not properly maintained.

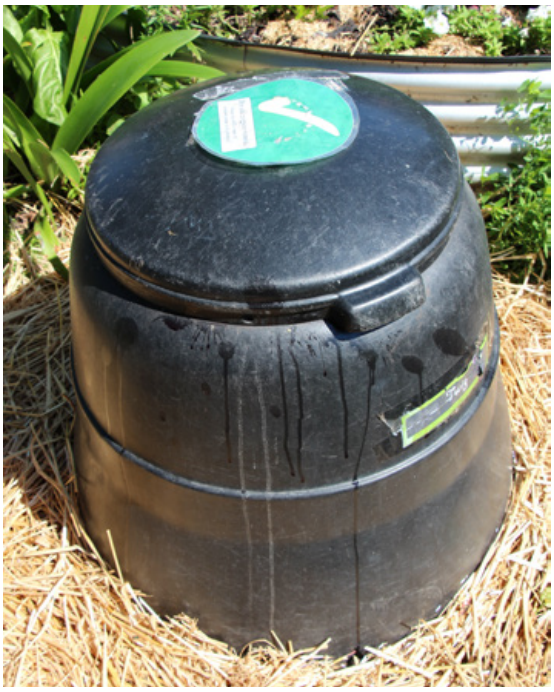
If we receive complaints about your composting system, City staff will arrange an inspection. We will help you address any issues, but if the problem persists we may have to remove the system.

The City's **Community Gardens Policy** includes details on our approach to community composting.

02 Appendix

System types

Dome bin



Dome compost bins – James St Reserve Community Garden

Positives

– Is cheap and simple to use;
– Has no joins or spaces for cockroaches to breed in;
– Easy to remove ready compost from underneath;
– Is easily transportable; and
– Is issued free at our Green Village workshops.

Negatives

– Leachates will drain from the bottom, so best used on permeable surfaces such as grass, soil or garden beds; and
– Vermin may be able enter from underneath.

Aerobins

Aerobin compost bin – Newtown Community Garden

Positives

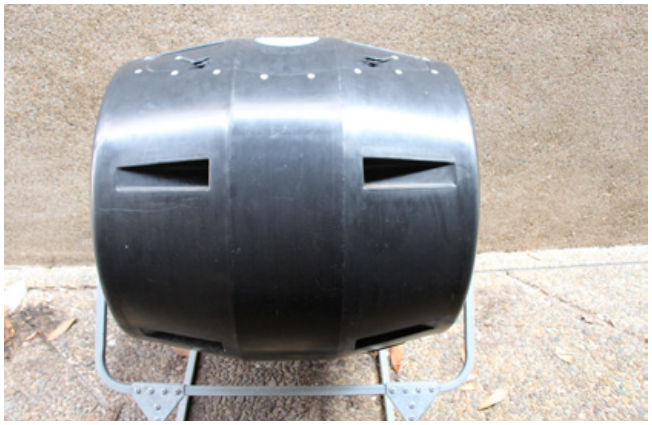
– Can process a large volume of materials;
– Has a built-in aeration system (with the correct input materials, the manufacturer claims that they do not require turning);
– Has insulated bin walls to help maintain higher temperatures; and
– No leachates can leak from the base.

Negatives

– Materials may not compost uniformly;
– The aeration system is easily damaged if the compost is turned;
– The aeration and drainage systems can become clogged;
– Cockroaches can live in the joins and gaps in the Aerobin bin structure; and
– Aerobins are more expensive than simpler systems.

System types

Tumbling composter



Tumbler composter – Town Hall house Garden

Positives

– No leachates leak as it is a sealed system;

– Less likely to attract vermin as it's off the ground.

Negatives

– You can't continuously add material. Once the tumbler is full, it is sealed until the compost is ready for use.

DIY Compost Bin

DIY Compost Bin – Woolloomooloo Community Garden

Positives

– Can be tailored to your needs and site; and

– The materials can be reused.

Negatives

– Consider aesthetics – everyone has a different perspective on what looks good;

– Needs to be robust and functional; and

– You may need to engage a local builder to help with construction.

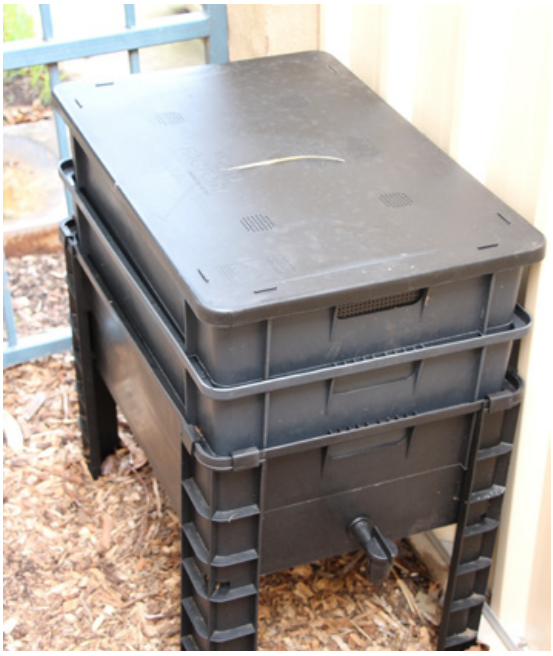
Top tips for successful community composting

1. Start small and expand if needed
2. Never compost meat, fish or dairy products
3. Avoid bread, pasta, rice and sugary processed foods
4. Line the base of your bin with chicken wire if vermin are getting in underneath
5. Cover food waste with a hessian sack to keep the flies out
6. Add manures, fresh grass clippings, coffee grounds or comfrey leaves to heat up your system and accelerate the composting process
7. Chop materials up into small pieces so they break down faster
8. If your system gets too acidic (vinegar flies are a sign) then add some garden lime, dolomite lime or wood ash
9. Seed your newly set up compost with some old compost and worms to introduce helpful microbes
10. Enjoy a free workout and conversations with the community!

02 Appendix

System types

Small worm farm



Small worm farm – St Helen's Community Garden

Positives
- Doesn't require dry materials;
- Less likely to attract larger vermin if kept intact so there are no gaps for them to enter; and
- Produces both worm castings and worm tea fertiliser.

Negatives
- Input materials are more restricted than composting (no citrus, onions or chilli);
- Worm farming can be slower than composting if you don't have a large system; and
- Input materials are limited to how much your worms can eat.

Large worm farm

Large worm farm – Woolloomooloo Community Garden

Positives
- Has a larger capacity than a typical domestic worm farm;
- Processes food scraps faster than a smaller system; and
- Worms and casting could be sold to help raise funds or donated/swapped for other needs.

Negatives
- Requires more space;
- Heavy to move once it is operational; and
- Input materials are more restricted than composting (no citrus, onions or chilli).

A guide to common composting and worm farm issues:

Issue	Solutions
Your compost is **TOO WET**	Compost should be moist but not soggy.
Are you adding lots of food waste and not enough dry materials?	Add an equal amount of dry materials every time food waste is added, such as shredded newspaper or cardboard, fine wood mulch, sawdust, straw or hay. Ensure the food waste you add is always covered with dry material or a hessian sack so it doesn't attract flies.
The compost is **TOO DRY**	Add water and reduce the amount of leaves, mulch or dry stuff being added.
The compost **SMELLS BAD**	Turn the compost more often, ideally once a week. Adding a sprinkle of garden lime can also help reduce acidity. Also ensure you have an equal mix of wet to dry materials.
RATS AND MICE are getting into the bin	Block any potential entry or exit points. If needed, dig the base of the bin into the ground and ensure the lid is secure. You could also put a sheet of chicken wire under the base of the bin to prevent vermin burrowing under. Turn the compost regularly to discourage vermin from nesting.
COCKROACHES make your compost bin their new home	Research natural options before using insecticides as you don't want to harm any good bacteria or worms. Try wiping eucalyptus oil around problem areas such as under the lid, around the rim and inside the bin. If the problem persists, apply boric acid powder in small amounts. Spent coffee grounds may also deter cockroaches.
TAKING TOO LONG to turn into ready compost for use in the garden	It can take 3-6 months for materials to break down. Chopping materials up helps, as does adding animal manures. Leaves can take longer to break down than materials like paper and card – so use a good mix of dry materials.

CITY OF SYDNEY

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