

Buyer's Guide / Composters

Make your own garden compost

There's nothing better for your garden - but first you need to find a good composter. Geoff Hodge reviews nine of the best

HOME-made garden compost is one of those things that you just can't afford to be without. Once it has broken down into that beautiful, brown, crumbly humus-like material, it has several uses around the garden. It's superb as a soil improver for light sandy and heavy clay soils and

it's a marvellous mulch. When well-made and free from weed seeds, pests and diseases, many gardeners also use it as an ingredient in home-made potting composts. 'Well-made' is the key, since some people find it difficult to make good compost but provided you follow the composting rules and have a good compost bin, then

you shouldn't go wrong. The one thing that lets some gardeners down is their compost bin or heap. Generally a small heap or bin is unlikely to build up enough heat for the compost to break down adequately. The bigger the bin the better, and a bin 60cm to 90cm (2-3ft) cubed or similar is the ideal size. However, some gardens are too small to have such a big bin and let's face it, most bins are not that attractive either! So, choose one that suits you and the place where you are going to keep it. A good compost bin should help retain warmth and moisture as this is important to help break down the compost quicker and a high temperature will kill off weed seeds and disease spores. It should also keep out heavy rain and moisture - soggy material will again be slower to break down - and let in some air.

- Suppliers**
The mail order companies supply a range of the compost bins featured.
- **Darlac Products** tel: 01753 547790, www.darlac.com
 - **Ferndale Lodge** tel: 08443 141342, www.ferndale-lodge.co.uk
 - **Garantia** tel: 01795 432700, www.garantia.co.uk
 - **Greenfingers.com**, tel: 08453 450728, www.greenfingers.com
 - **Green Gardener** tel: 01493 750061, www.greengardener.co.uk
 - **Green Goods UK**, tel: 01327 357959, www.greengoodsuk.co.uk
 - **Harrod Horticultural** tel: 08454 025300, www.harrodhorticultural.com
 - **Sankey Home & Garden Products** tel: 01159 277335, www.rsankey.com
 - **Strata Products**, 01773 510520, www.strataproducts.co.uk

Sankey Ecomax Compost Bin

£32.99; £44.99

The Ecomax Compost Bin is made from recycled high-density polyethylene. It has a tight-fitting, easy-lift-off lid and a door hatch at the base. It has a wide base area for maximum microbial action and speedy breakdown.

- **Sizes** 76cm x 76cm x 86cm high (30x30x34in); 83cm x 83cm x 101cm high (33x33x40in)
- **Capacity** 220 litres; 330 litres
- **Supplied by** Sankey Home and Garden Products



Earthmaker

£149

Three chambers use gravity to take the hard work out of composting. Fresh waste goes in the top, heats up and reduces in volume, so more waste can be added. After several weeks, pull out the panel that separates the first chamber allowing the partially composted waste to tumble into the middle chamber. Here it continues to compost then spills down into the lower chamber where it can be harvested from the door.

- **Size** 75cm (30in) diameter, 1.2m (48in) high
- **Capacity** 466 litres
- **Supplied by** Green Gardener

Rotol Composter

£29.99; £34.99

The Rotol Composter comes ready to use. Made from high strength 100 per cent recycled polyethylene. Secure easy access lid for insulation.

- **Sizes** 76cm (30in) diameter at base, 46cm (18in) at top, 77cm (31in) high; 102cm (40in) diameter at base, 46cm (18in) at top, 77cm (31in) high
- **Capacity** 220 litres; 300 litres
- **Supplied by** Harrod Horticultural



THE ROTOL COMPONSTER COMES READY TO USE

Garantia Eco-King Composter

Garantia Eco-King Composter

£54.99; £69.99

The Eco-King is made from UV-stable polypropylene. The Wind-Fix lid adjustment means ventilation can be controlled. Twin lid flaps ensure easy filling and the removable base flaps allow for easy compost removal.

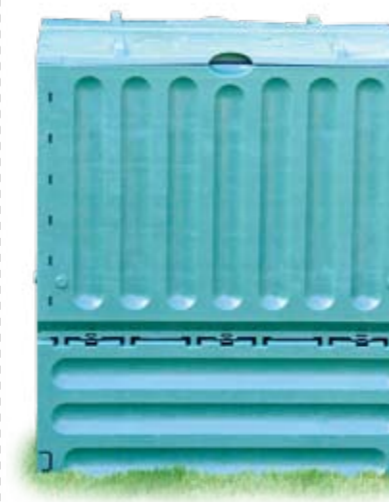
- **Sizes** 70cm x 70cm x 83cm high (28 x 28 x 33in); 80cm x 80cm x 95cm high (32 x 32 x 38in)
- **Capacity** 400 litres; 600 litres
- **Supplied by** Greenfingers.com

Garantia Thermo-King Composter

£49.99; £69.99; £89.99

Made from Thermolen (a high quality recycled polyethylene), the Thermo-King provides excellent insulation. This, together with an optimal aeration system, ensures fast composting. The twin-flap lid allows easy filling and has two positions to regulate air circulation or protect against wind. Two large base flaps provide access to the compost.

- **Sizes** 74cm x 74cm x 84cm high (29½ x 29½ x 33in); 80cm x 80cm x 104cm high (32 x 32 x 41½in); 100cm by 100cm by 100cm high (40 x 40 x 40in)
- **Capacity** 400 litres; 600 litres; 900 litres



GN TOP TIP
Add different material in layers to help everything compost down more quickly

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ThermoQuick Express Composter

£66.99; £76.99

The ThermoQuick Express Composter is made from 100 per cent recycled co-polymer plastic. Multiple air vents provide optimal composting conditions. Compost access is via four removable doors. The lid remains upright for easy loading and stays shut to prevent wind or animals getting in.

- **Sizes** 75cm x 75cm x 85cm high (30 x 30 x 34in); 85cm x 85cm x 105cm high (34x34x42in)
- **Capacity**: 400 litres; 600 litres
- **Supplied by** Greenfingers.com



THE LID PREVENTS WIND OR ANIMALS GETTING IN



Darlac Garden Composter

£9.99

A small composter, taking up little space and suitable for small gardens or patio. Made from heavy-duty, UV-stabilised, laminated polyethylene, it has drainage holes in the base and sides. A zipped lid helps to keep in heat and there's a Velcro panel at the base for easy access to the compost.

- **Size** 40cm (16in) diameter, 80cm (32in) high
- **Capacity** 100-litres

Strata Compost Bin

£39.99

A traditional compact compost bin with lockable lid and bottom hatch to give access to finished compost.

- **Size** 73cm (29in) diameter, 88cm (35in) high
- **Capacity**: 220 litres



Green Goods Aerobin

£249

The Aerobin uses a patented 'lung' or aeration core inside a sealed, insulated bin that conserves heat, leading to rapid breakdown, even in cool weather. It is easy to use - just open the lid, drop in the waste and close. Compost is easily accessed via the lower door. It also produces a liquid fertiliser that can be drained off via a tap at the base.

- **Size** 74cm x 74cm x 120cm high (29x29x48in)
- **Capacity** 400 litres

Top tips

- The bacteria and micro-organisms that produce the compost function best when there is a good mix of ingredients.
- Cut up or shred anything that is too large - the smaller the material the better.
- Aim for 25 to 50 per cent soft green materials (grass clippings, annual weeds, vegetable kitchen waste or manure). The remainder should be woody or brown material (prunings, wood chippings, paper, cardboard, straw or dead leaves).
- Make sure the compost matter is kept moist but not soggy and try to keep in as much heat as possible.

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