

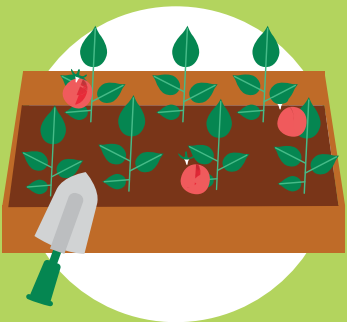
Why compost at home?

Composting at home turns your food and garden waste into free food for your soil to help your garden and plants flourish!

After reducing the food we waste in the first place, composting our food scraps is also an important and practical way households can help combat climate change and contribute to a healthier environment.

Any size and type of household can compost at home. Used alongside your food and garden organic (FOGO) weekly bin collection, home composting keeps food waste out of landfill, saving you money in the process.

Merri-bek's composting at home program provides subsidised compost bins and worm farms as well as free education, advice and support to get you started and keep on composting!

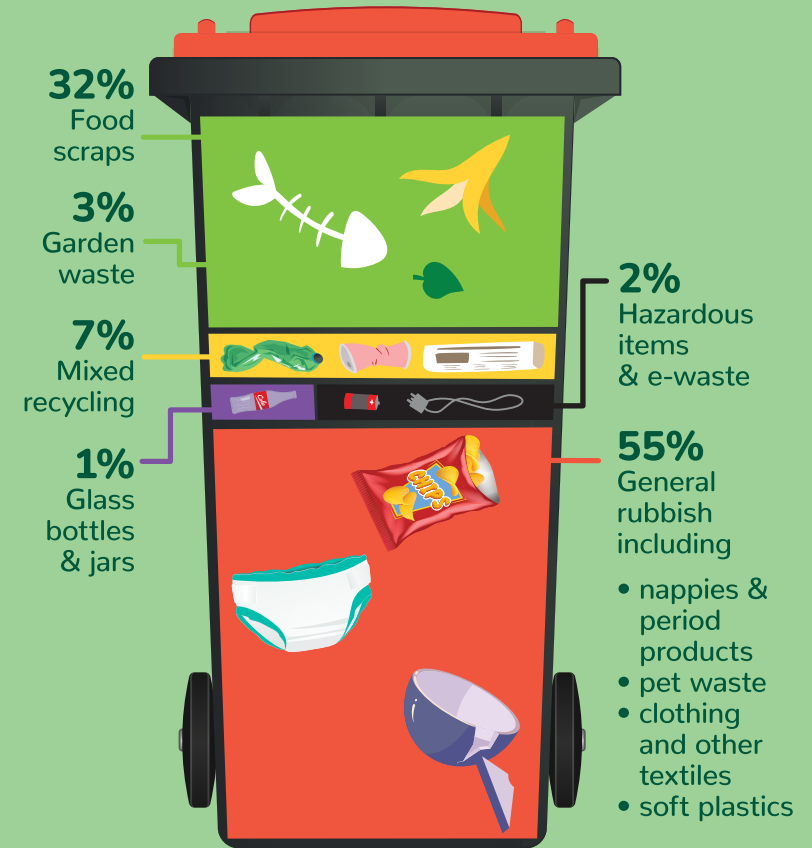


Learn more about our program and buy discounted equipment here: merri-bek.vic.gov.au/composting

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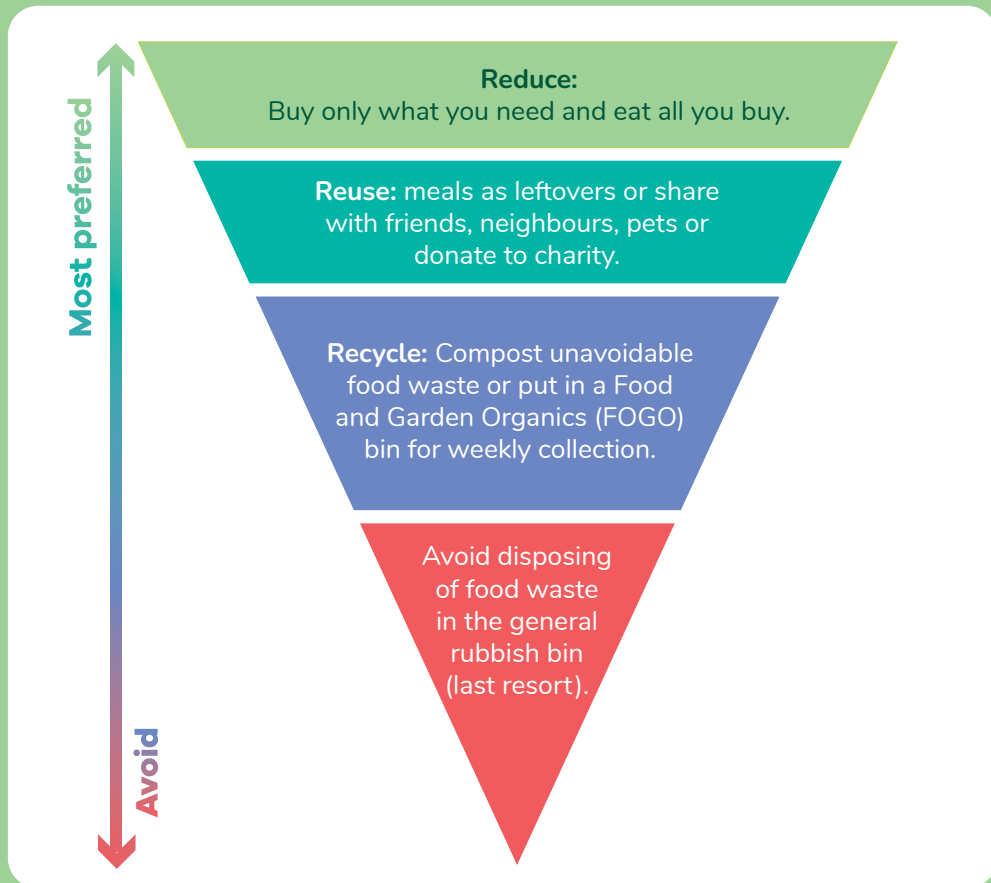
Did you know that the average household general rubbish bin in Merri-bek contains 35% food and garden waste?¹



That's 9250 tonnes of food and garden waste going to landfill every year. Once buried in landfill, food waste breaks down without oxygen producing methane, a greenhouse gas that's 25 times more powerful than carbon dioxide. Carbon dioxide and methane pollution in our atmosphere is overheating our planet and driving dangerous bushfires, lethal heatwaves and other devastating impacts.

¹Merri-bek Kerbside audit 2024 General Rubbish

Household food waste actions



In the food waste hierarchy, the most important action households can take is to **Reduce** or avoid food waste in the first place - buy only the food you need and eat what you buy. Then **Reuse** any leftover food.

Any remaining food waste can be **recycled** by composting at home (turning it into a useful food for your garden soil) and / or by placing it in your food and garden organics (FOGO) bin. Bins are emptied weekly and taken to a bulk composting facility and turned into compost and soil improvers for local farms and gardens.

What is composting?



Composting is the natural process of decomposing organic matter. To compost successfully at home, you need to:

- Add the right balance of 'brown' carbon-based materials (dry leaves or grass, shredded paper) to 'green' nitrogen-based materials (food scraps) and avoid certain materials
- Turn the compost regularly
- Keep the compost moist

In a **compost bin**, food and garden waste is broken down by microorganisms with the help of oxygen, turning it into a nutrient rich compost.

In a **worm farm**, worms feed off the bacteria from decomposing vegetable and fruit scraps producing liquid leachate and worm 'poo' or castings which are great garden fertilisers.

A **Bokashi bin** works by fermenting food scraps in an airtight container without oxygen.

Whichever system you use, composting at home can be easy with a bit of practice. Observing your compost bin or worm farm will tell you all you need to know to make adjustments and create the right conditions for microorganisms and worms to produce the perfect food for a thriving garden!

Choosing a compost system




There is a compost system to suit everyone, from single person households to large families, homes with large or small yards and even apartments.

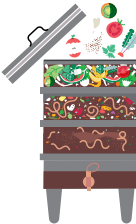

The type of system that's right for you will depend on the space you have, your garden needs and the type and amount of food and garden waste you produce.




The following guide can help you choose which system to start with – you may end up using more than one or changing composting systems over time as you learn more about what works and what doesn't, or if your circumstances change.

You also don't need to purchase something new – compost bins or worm farms can be made out of discarded household items or hard rubbish like pallets, bricks, old buckets or bins, a bathtub, or polystyrene boxes.

<p>Things to consider / best suited to</p>	<p>Compost Bin</p> 
<p>Speed of process</p>	<p>Slow</p>
<p>Household size</p>	<p>Medium to large</p>
<p>Type of home</p>	<p>Larger yards or gardens, in direct contact with ground / soil</p>
<p>Required conditions</p>	<p>Place in sun or shade. Tolerates a wide range of temperatures but will compost faster in warm, sunny positions.</p>
<p>Type of food / garden waste</p>	<p>All garden waste except large branches and noxious weeds. Food waste except for meat, bones, oils/dairy, bread and pasta. Only small amounts of citrus fruit, onion and garlic</p>
<p>Amount of food / garden waste</p>	<p>Can process high and variable volumes of food and garden waste, depending on size of the system as long as the volume of nitrogen rich / 'green' (food) and carbon based 'brown' (leaves/cuttings/newspaper) waste is in balance</p>

<p>Worm Farm</p> 	<p>Bokashi</p> 
<p>Medium</p>	<p>Fast</p>
<p>Small to medium</p>	<p>Small to large</p>
<p>Small garden or courtyard</p>	<p>All types</p>
<p>The ideal temperature range for worms is 18-24 degrees celsius. Keep them active in winter by placing in a warm spot and prevent them from dieing in summer by keeping them in the shade and protecting from hot temperatures and winds.</p>	<p>Keep indoors / at room temperature</p>
<p>Vegetable and fruit scraps only, except garlic, onion, chilli and citrus fruit</p>	<p>All food waste, including meat, bones, dairy, bread and pasta</p>
<p>Amount of waste must be matched to the number of worms / size of the farm because underfeeding or overfeeding can kill the worms</p>	<p>Limited by size of Bokashi bucket but because it ferments rapidly, food waste can be turned over quickly</p>

<p>Things to consider / best suited to</p>	<p>Compost Bin</p> 
<p>Type of compost produced and uses</p>	<p>Nutrient rich compost which can be added directly to soil to immediately improve water holding capacity and supply plants with nutrients</p>
<p>Benefits</p>	<p>The most flexible and forgiving system in terms of design / materials, types of waste and processing conditions</p>
<p>Drawbacks</p>	<p>Can take a longer time to compost than other systems, need a yard / outdoor space and contact with soil (compost tumblers are the exception). Needs to be managed to discourage vermin / pests</p>
<p>What about pet poo?</p>	<p>Can be composted using a separate compost bin which will NOT be used on food plants. An inground system located in an ornamental area of the garden may be suitable</p>

<p>Worm Farm</p> 	<p>Bokashi</p> 
<p>Worm castings and liquid leachate are strong fertilisers. Dilute liquid to colour of strong tea before adding to garden. Worm castings can be sprinkled around the base of established plants / seedlings where it acts like a slow release fertiliser</p>	<p>Fermented 'precompost' can be added to a compost bin or buried in a new garden bed (yours or a friends) where it will continue to break down and improve the soil ready for new plants</p>
<p>Good option for apartments and small spaces. Processes vegetable waste faster and more efficiently than compost bins producing high quality fertiliser</p>	<p>Best option for indoor areas including apartments. Processes the widest range of food waste in the shortest time</p>
<p>Sensitive to temperature / heat, and needs monitoring / regular feeding. More limited in types of food that can be processed than other systems</p>	<p>Sensitive to temperature. The Bokashi bucket could be homemade but need to continue to buy the enzyme activator. Fermented food needs to be broken down further, so need access to a compost bin or a garden to bury it in</p>
<p>A dedicated worm farm can be used to process pet poo EXCEPT for immediately after the pet has been wormed. DO NOT use worm castings and liquid leachate from this system on food plants – only ornamentals</p>	<p>A dedicated bokashi bin can be used even when the pet has been wormed and if the fermented 'precompost' is NOT added to compost or soil which will be used to grow food plants.</p>

Resources and Further Reading

Compost Community provides discounted compost systems, free education, advice and support through local government subsidy programs. compostcommunity.com.au

Compost Revolution works with local government across Australia to provide composting education and discounted equipment, including easy to understand on-line composting, worm farming and Bokashi tutorials compostrevolution.com.au/tutorials/

Sustainable Gardening Australia provides a detailed and useful guide to composting, which includes what you can and can't compost as well as solutions to common composting problems. sgaonline.org.au/the-science-of-composting/

Merri-bek Food and Garden Organics (FOGO) weekly bin collection can be used for any food and garden waste that can't be added to a home compost system. merri-bek.vic.gov.au/FOGO

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