Composting Made Easy

Turn Trash into Treasure, One Worm at a Time



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Introduction

Welcome to the wonderful, slightly wiggly world beneath your garden's surface — where rotting banana peels become gold, worms are your best friends, and mulch isn't just a funny word, it's the secret to growing magic.

If you've ever looked at a pile of leaves or veggie scraps and thought, "Should I just chuck this in the bin?" — this little book is for you.

In these pages, we'll explore the hidden kingdom of compost, mulch, and microbes. We'll learn how to make soil so happy it practically hums, how to feed your plants without lifting a fork, and how to reduce waste while boosting growth.

Best of all? You don't need a big yard, fancy tools, or even a clue where to begin. Just a love of gardens and a willingness to let nature do its weird and wonderful things.

This book is part of a series created to help you grow more with less — less space, less fuss, and definitely less mud under your nails. So grab a cuppa, roll up your sleeves (just in case), and let's turn trash into treasure — one worm at a time.

Soil Isn't Just Dirt 01

If you've ever kicked at a patch of ground and thought, "Eh, it's just dirt," then my friend, prepare to have your socks (and possibly your gardening gloves) blown off.

Because soil — *real, living soil* — is one of the most complex, fascinating, and downright magical substances on the planet.

It's not just the brown stuff under your feet. It's a thriving ecosystem, a tiny universe made up of minerals, water, organic matter, fungi, bacteria, worms, beetles, and millions of microscopic critters that we'll never see — but who do the heavy lifting to keep our plants alive.

In fact, a single teaspoon of healthy soil contains more living organisms than there are people on Earth. *Wrap your spade around that for a second.*

🌿 **Dead Dirt vs Living Soil**
So what's the difference between the dusty stuff in an old planter and the rich, dark, crumbly stuff that smells like the forest after rain?

Dead dirt is lifeless. It's compacted, dry, and mostly inert. You can grow plants in it… kind of. But they'll struggle, constantly begging you for water, fertiliser, and pep talks.

Living soil, on the other hand, is bursting with activity. It's spongy and loose. It smells earthy (but never foul). It holds moisture like a sponge but drains well. And most importantly, it *feeds your plants* naturally, thanks to the armies of microbes and decomposers within.

So… How Do You Get Living Soil?

You don't need to buy expensive bags or mystery potions. You just need to give your soil what it loves:

- **Organic matter** — compost, mulch, kitchen scraps, worm castings
- **Moisture** — but not too much
- **Oxygen** — soil needs air too!

Patience — good soil is like a good sourdough starter: a little weird, a little smelly at first, and totally worth it

Why This Matters for YOU

If you're going to grow anything — lettuce, herbs, roses, tomatoes, the odd rogue pumpkin — your success starts below ground.

Think of soil like the foundation of a house. If it's solid and well-built, the rest takes care of itself. But if it's a crumbling mess of concrete dust and spiderwebs… well, don't be surprised when things fall apart.

So before we talk about what to plant or how to mulch or where to put that worm bin, we're going to honour the ground beneath our feet.

Because once you understand what your soil *wants*… you'll grow more, weed less, and start seeing magic happen.





Turbo Tip #1: Sniff Before You Sow

"If your soil smells fresh and earthy — like the forest after rain — it's ready for action.
If it smells like wet socks left in a gym bag… back away slowly and feed it some compost before planting. Trust me. I once tried to grow spinach in pongy dirt and it came out *haunted.*"
— *Turbo, Soil Sniffer Extraordinaire*

02 Composting 101 Turning Scraps into Gold

If compost is the five-star meal your soil dreams of, then mulch is the fluffy blanket it tucks itself into afterwards.

Mulch is *not* just a bunch of dead leaves you forget to rake. It's a powerhouse tool in your gardening kit — keeping moisture in, weeds out, and your soil temp just right.
Think of it as the soil's personal spa treatment.



So, What *Is* Mulch?

In simple terms, mulch is any organic (or sometimes inorganic) material you spread over the top of your soil. It can be:

- **Straw or hay**
- **Wood chips or bark**
- **Grass clippings**
- **Shredded leaves or newspaper**
- **Compost (yes, compost can be mulch too!)**
- Or even **seaweed**, if you're a coastal wizard



Some folks even use gravel or plastic sheeting, but in this book, we're going au naturel.

Why Mulch is Magical

Here's what a good layer of mulch can do for your garden:

- **Keeps soil moist** by reducing evaporation
- **Stops weeds** from growing where they don't belong
- **Regulates soil temperature** so roots don't cook or freeze
- **Protects microbes** in the topsoil from harsh sun or cold
- **Slowly breaks down**, feeding the soil over time

Plus, it makes your garden look tidy — even if you're just winging it behind the scenes.



How to Mulch Like a Pro

- Spread 3–5 cm thick — too thin = weeds, too thick = soggy soil
- Keep it **away from the base of plants** so stems don't rot
- Reapply a couple of times a year (especially after heavy rain or summer heatwaves)

Mix and match! A combo of straw + leaves + compost is basically garden lasagna



Lazy Gardener's Secret Weapon

If you're the type who forgets to water or hates weeding (hi, it me 🤦), mulch will change your life. Once it's down, your soil stays happy and you do *way* less running around with the hose. It's not cheating — it's clever. 😏



Turbo Tip #1: Don't Mulch Your Mum's Carpet

"Mulch is great — until you use something weird and your plants stage a protest.
Once I tried mulching with an old curtain. The slugs moved in. The lettuce wept. Never again. Stick to the good stuff: straw, bark, compost. Not textiles. Or your ex's hoodie."
— *Turbo, Mulch Inspector & Mistake Repeater*

What NOT to Compost 03

Composting might be magical, but not everything belongs in your garden's gourmet rot pot. There are a few things that can turn your compost from garden gold to… well… a stinky, slimy disaster even Turbo wouldn't peck at.

So before you chuck *everything* in the bin and call it earthy goodness, here's a handy guide to keep your compost *clean, green, and critter-free*.

1. No Meat, Dairy or Oily Foods

Why not?
These rot *badly*, attract rats, and smell like heartbreak. Plus, they throw off your green-brown balance.



🚫 Examples:

- Cheese
- Bacon scraps
- Buttered toast
- Chicken bones
- Last night's pizza crust (Turbo says: "Eat it yourself. Don't be rude.")

2. Easy on the Onions & Citrus

A little bit is okay, but too much acidity upsets your worms and slows down decomposition.
🚫 Avoid:

- Orange & lemon peels (in excess)
- Onion skins & cores

Pickled foods
Use them sparingly or chuck them in a Bokashi bin instead.

3. Glossy Paper, Magazines & Junk Mail

Sure, they're "paper"… but that shiny coating is full of plastics and inks your microbes *hate*. They can also take *forever* to break down.
✅ Use instead: plain cardboard, shredded paper, or egg cartons.

4. Anything Chemically Treated

If you wouldn't want to grow veggies in it, don't compost it.
🚫 Examples:

- Painted or varnished wood
- Chemically dyed fabrics
- Pet poo from dogs/cats (contains pathogens)
- Vacuum cleaner contents (synthetics galore!)



5. Bread, Pasta & Rice (Maybe)

While technically compostable, these attract pests and go mouldy fast.
If you *must* compost them, bury deep and mix well.
Turbo once tried composting a baguette. The ants are *still* laughing.

6. Too Much of Anything

Even the "good stuff" gets grumpy if overdone. Compost likes a balance — so don't overload on one thing, like:

- Lawn clippings (they mat & stink)
- Fruit peels (can make things soggy)
- Manure (too hot in excess)

Bonus Rule: If It's Weird… Leave It Out
If you're not sure whether it belongs — don't risk it. Google it, ask a garden mate, or save it for later. Compost can recover from mistakes, but why stress it?



Turbo Tip #2: If You Wouldn't Sniff It… Don't Compost It

"Listen, compost is supposed to smell earthy, not like a dragon's armpit. If it makes you gag, your worms will mutiny and I will not be held responsible. Keep it simple, keep it clean, and *step away from the takeaway container.*"

— Turbo, Decomposer-in-Chief & Aroma Aficionado

Meet the Microbes, The Underground Superheroes

04

Hidden in every handful of healthy soil is a bustling metropolis. A microscopic city of movers, shakers, builders, recyclers, and caretakers — all working 24/7 to keep your garden alive.

They don't wear capes (they'd get soggy). They don't ask for thanks (though your plants give it). But these microbes — tiny bacteria, fungi, protozoa and more — are what truly make your soil living.

Without them, compost wouldn't compost. Worms wouldn't have dinner. Plants would starve.

And Turbo… well, Turbo would be yelling at dead lettuce again.

What Are Soil Microbes?

Soil microbes are the microscopic life forms that live in the soil and perform *essential* jobs like:

- Breaking down organic matter
- Unlocking nutrients so plants can absorb them
- Forming symbiotic relationships with plant roots
- Fighting off nasty soil-borne diseases
- Building soil structure and resilience

Think of them as the underground network of workers keeping everything running smoothly. If your garden were a concert, microbes would be the sound crew, lighting riggers, and backstage managers making it all happen while the plants take the spotlight.

Meet the Microbial Superstars

Bacteria
Billions live in a teaspoon of soil! They break down dead stuff and release nutrients. Some even fix nitrogen from the air — free fertiliser!

Fungi
Nope, not just mushrooms. These thread-like beings connect to plant roots, forming **mycorrhizal networks** (aka the Wood Wide Web). They help plants share nutrients and talk to each other. Yes, really.



Protozoa & Nematodes

Tiny creatures that feed on bacteria and fungi, keeping populations in balance. They're the predators in your garden's microscopic jungle.

Actinomycetes

These guys are responsible for that sweet "fresh earth" smell. They're like the compost world's perfumers.



Why You Should Care

Healthy microbial life means:

- Faster decomposition
- Nutrient-rich compost and soil
- Stronger, more resilient plants
- Better water retention

Fewer pests and diseases

It's like having a whole garden staff underground — working while you nap, sip tea, or forget to water your beans.

Don't Sterilise the Soil!

If you overuse chemical fertilisers, pesticides, or dig obsessively, you risk wiping out your microbial army. Instead:

- Feed your soil compost and organic matter
- Avoid over-tilling
- Don't water with boiling water (yes, that's a thing people try!)
- Let nature do its job



Turbo Tip #3: Microbes are the Ultimate Flatmates

“Sure, you can’t see them.
But they’re everywhere — and they clean up, cook the compost, and pay rent in nutrients.
Way better than Barry the pigeon who never does the dishes.”
— Turbo, Microbe Motivator & Flatmate Eviction Specialist

05 Worm Farming — Wigglers With Purpose

If compost is garden gold, then worms are the *jewellers* that make it sparkle.

These humble, squiggly creatures might look like living noodles, but under the surface, they’re aerating, digesting, fertilising, and straight-up transforming your soil from meh to magnificent. If your compost bin was a business, worms would be the overworked, underpaid interns doing 90% of the labour.

Why Worms Matter

Worms:

- Break down organic material into nutrient-rich castings (aka worm poop — your soil loves it)
- Aerate soil naturally, improving water flow and root access
- Balance bacteria and fungi in the soil (they're little ecosystem managers!)

Turn your kitchen waste into a garden superfood faster than standard compost alone

Basically, worms are the unsung heroes of the garden — no cape, all power.

Building a Worm Farm (aka The Squiggle Spa)

You don't need anything fancy. In fact, you can build a worm bin with a:

- Plastic tub with holes in the bottom
- Old polystyrene box with a lid
- Repurposed drawer, crate, or even a stack of buckets

What You'll Need:

- **A safe home**: dark, moist, breathable, and protected from sun/rain
- **Bedding**: shredded newspaper, cardboard, coco coir, or dry leaves
- **Red wriggler worms** (*Eisenia fetida* — the compost superstars)

Food: chopped veggie scraps, coffee grounds, tea bags, eggshells

Top tip: Bury food under the bedding so it doesn't attract pests or dry out.

What NOT to Feed Worms

They are picky little pals, and a wrong snack can send them slithering. Avoid:

- Citrus or onion (too acidic)
- Spicy foods (they're not into drama)
- Meat, dairy, and oils (smelly and unsafe)

Bread or pasta (can turn slimy fast)



Worm Bin Maintenance: Easy Peasy

- Keep it moist like a wrung-out sponge
- Add fresh bedding every few weeks
- Harvest castings every 2–3 months (your plants will SWOON)
- If it smells bad — you've either overfed or forgotten to air it (fixable!)

Harvesting the Worm Poo (Yes, Really)

When the bin looks full of dark, crumbly material with little or no food left, it's harvest time! Separate the worms gently (or lure them to one side with fresh food), scoop out the castings, and spread them around your garden like black magic.

PLANTS WILL LITERALLY PERK UP OVERNIGHT.





Turbo Tip #4: Don't Name the Worms

“I got attached to a worm once. Called him Kevin. Next thing I knew, he was under a cabbage making compost and I hadn’t heard from him in weeks. Trust me — love them, but don’t name them. They’re emotionally distant.”

— Turbo, Worm Whisperer & Cabbage Consultant

Worm Tea & Compost Juice — Liquid Gold for Your Garden

06

Just when you thought compost couldn’t get more fabulous — surprise!

It also comes in *liquid form.* Welcome to the secret world of worm tea and compost juice: potent, nutrient-rich brews that give your plants an instant pick-me-up.

Think of it as a *green smoothie* for your veggies, herbs, and flowers. One shot of this magical elixir and they’re suddenly posing like they’re in a garden catalogue.



So What *Is* Worm Tea?

Worm tea is made by steeping **worm castings** (aka worm poo) in water. This releases beneficial microbes and nutrients into a brew you can pour directly onto your plants. It's like giving your soil a triple-shot espresso and a back massage.

How to Make Worm Tea

You'll Need:

- A handful or two of **finished worm castings**
- A **bucket of dechlorinated water** (leave tap water out overnight if needed)
- A spoon or stick for stirring
- Optional: a bit of **molasses** to feed the microbes (1 tsp)

Simple Method:

1. Put the worm castings in a breathable bag (old sock, cheesecloth, etc.)
2. Drop it into the bucket like a giant teabag
3. Let it soak for 24–48 hours, stirring occasionally
4. Pour it around the base of plants or use it as a foliar spray

Use within a few days for best results. This is **live juice** — the fresher, the better.



What About Compost Juice?

Sometimes, your compost bin or worm farm will produce a liquid at the bottom — this is **leachate**, or compost juice.
But hold up! Unlike worm tea, compost juice can vary wildly. It may contain harmful bacteria if the compost is too wet or anaerobic (oxygen-deprived). So don't go dumping it on your tomatoes just yet.

What to Do:

- If it smells **sweet and earthy** — dilute 10:1 with water and apply to soil
- If it smells **gross** — toss it or use it on non-edibles (ornamentals, trees)

💡 Pro Tip: A worm farm with a tap at the bottom makes collection super easy. Just check it regularly so it doesn't become a swamp of doom.

When & Where to Use Worm Tea

Great for:

- Seedlings
- Veggies
- Herbs
- Flowers
- Tired-looking houseplants



Not ideal for:

- Cacti or succulents (too rich!)
- Waterlogged plants (let them dry out first)

Apply in the cool of the morning or evening — your plants will slurp it up like iced coffee in summer.



Turbo Tip #7: Don't Drink It, Darling
"Yes, it's called tea.
Yes, it looks like weak Earl Grey.
No, you *absolutely should not* serve it with scones.
Trust me. Barry tried. He's still off crumpets.
Stick to feeding it to your soil — your roses will thank you. Your guests won't."
— *Turbo, Beverage Snob & Rose Whisperer*



07 Container Gardening for Compost Queens

Short on space? No problem. Don't have perfect soil? Who does!
Whether you've got a balcony, a courtyard, or just a sunny windowsill — **container gardening** is your best friend.
With a few pots, some compost, and a bit of Turbo-style cheek, you can grow an entire salad in a square metre (and brag about it to everyone you know, naturally).

Why Grow in Pots?

- You control the soil quality (no mystery sandpits!)
- It's easier on the back and knees
- Less weeding, more lounging
- Great for renters, tiny homes, and rebellious gardeners

You can move things around like a planty game of musical chairs

Plus, it just looks flipping adorable.



Best Plants for Container Gardens

You'll be amazed what thrives in a pot when given love and the occasional worm tea chaser.



🥬 **Easy Edibles:**

- Lettuce, rocket, spinach
- Radishes
- Spring onions
- Baby carrots
- Strawberries
- Cherry tomatoes
- Chillies
- Herbs (basil, parsley, thyme, mint... but mint in its own pot unless you want a *mint-pocalypse*)



Pretty + Practical:

- Marigolds (pest repellents!)
- Nasturtiums (edible & gorgeous)
- Calendula
- Dwarf sunflowers



Choosing the Right Container

Basically: if it holds soil and drains water — it's fair game.
But keep in mind:

- **Terracotta** breathes well but dries fast
- **Plastic** holds moisture better (and is lightweight)
- **Upcycled** items add charm (old boots, drawers, teapots… yes please!)

Size matters — bigger roots need bigger pots.

Add drainage holes if there aren't any. Otherwise, your basil might drown while you're admiring it.

Soil & Compost Mix

In a pot, soil is everything. You want light, rich, well-draining goodness.

Suggested blend:

- 1 part compost
- 1 part potting mix
- 1 part coconut coir or perlite (for fluffiness!)

A handful of worm castings (Turbo demands this)



Mix it up, fluff it in, and get planting.



Caring for Potted Plants
Water more often — they dry out quicker than in-ground beds
Feed every few weeks with diluted worm tea or compost juice
Mulch with straw, shredded leaves or even grass clippings to retain moisture
Rotate pots for even sun exposure (especially if they get leggy)



Turbo Tip #8: Label Your Pots (Unless You Like Surprises)

"Once, I planted mint, coriander, and a mystery seed from Barry's lunch.
Guess which one turned out to be a rogue daffodil and confused everyone?
Don't be like me. Label your pots — your taste buds will thank you."
— Turbo, Container Commander & Accidental Florist



Lazy Mulching — Let the Ground Do the Work

08

Want a lush, thriving garden with less watering, fewer weeds, and happy soil critters?
Mulch is your answer. And best of all — it's the ultimate lazy gardener's secret weapon.
It's like putting a duvet over your soil: cozy, protective, and very good at hiding things you don't want to deal with (like that one weed you keep pretending not to see).

What is Mulch?

Mulch is any material layered on top of the soil to retain moisture, suppress weeds, regulate temperature, and slowly break down into more delicious organic matter.
Plus, it makes everything look ***so*** much tidier. Like your garden just got a fancy haircut.

Best Mulch Materials

🟤 Organic (breaks down over time = feeds your soil)

- Straw or hay (weed-free, please!)
- Leaf litter
- Grass clippings (light layers only!)
- Shredded newspaper or cardboard
- Bark chips
- **Compost (yep, it counts!)**

Inorganic (long-lasting, for decoration or heat retention)

- Gravel or pebbles
- Landscape fabric

Pinecones, sea shells, or decorative stones

Pro Tip: For food gardens, organic mulches are best — they nourish as they decompose.

How to Mulch Like a Pro

1. **Clear the area** of weeds and fluff the soil
2. **Water well** — mulch locks in moisture, so start hydrated
3. **Apply mulch** 2–5 cm thick (don't suffocate your plants)
4. **Keep clear of stems** — leave a little breathing room

Top up every few months as it breaks down

It's that easy. And once mulched, your soil will thank you by *not turning into dry cement next summer.*



Mulching Mistakes to Avoid

- **Too thick** = soggy soil, rot, and sad worms
- **Too close to stems** = can cause disease
- **Weedy straw or hay** = introduces future enemies
- **Plastic weed matting** = strangles soil life over time

Turbo says: *if the worms don't like it, it ain't worth it.*



Turbo Tip #9: Mulch Covers a Multitude of Gardening Sins

"Forgot to weed? Mulch it.
Soil cracked like toast? Mulch it.
Dropped your sandwich in the garden? Mulch it — then eat a new one.
Mulch doesn't judge. It just hugs the earth and says, 'I got you.'"
— Turbo, Chief of Chill Gardening & Sandwich Recovery Expert



Final Thoughts: Grow Your Garden, Grow Your Joy

Gardening isn't just about soil and seeds — it's about *connection*.
To nature. To nourishment. To something bigger than the daily rush of life.
It's about learning to slow down. To watch. To listen. To giggle at slugs, dance in the rain, and squeal when your first lettuce sprouts.
Whether you're growing one pot of parsley or turning your yard into a jungle — you're creating magic.
You're nurturing not just plants, but peace. Patience. And possibility.
And that, my friend, is the real harvest.
So pour that worm tea, fluff that mulch, and remember…
You don't have to be perfect to be a *bloomin' brilliant gardener* — you just have to *start.*



Turbo's Final Tip: You're Doing Just Ducking Fine

"If your compost smells weird,
If your kale flops over,
If your worm farm becomes a nightclub for ants…
Don't panic.
It's all part of the ride. You're learning.
Growing. Trying.
And frankly — you're smashing it.
Feathers up, my fabulous friend. You've got this."

— *Turbo, Life Coach in a Singlet*

If you loved this little adventure, there's more to come!

Look out for future titles in the *"Turbo Garden Series"* — all filled with helpful tips, friendly humour, and dirt under the wings.

And don't forget to visit our blog for extra goodies, bonus content, and garden giggles:



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Thank you for spending time in the garden with us.
May your leaves be lush, your compost rich, and your worms ever wiggly.

With all our beaky love,
Turbo & A.J. Thomas

