

Through the Garden Gate

Compost

Animal manure is a rich, valuable garden soil additive and may be used between the layers of compost. The heat generated by the manure will induce quick decomposition of raw compost.

The compost should be turned with a garden fork from time to time to aerate and to promote even decomposition.

Cover the heap to keep excess rain from leaching out nutrients, keeping stray wildlife away and also help to "heat up" the pile.

Save old tea bags and put one or two in the bottom of plant pots to help retain moisture. Also use teabags in the bottom of runner bean trenches.

Paper from an office shredder will rot well in a compost heap !

Make a 3ft (1m) cube with four posts and chicken wire as a leaf mould cage. Leaves rot more slowly than garden debris so it's best to rot them separately. Press the leaves down firmly to compress them - it takes about 18 months to have a rich mulch.

Always cover old potato tubers with other debris when they are put in the compost. This prevents any with blight fungus from sprouting and spreading spores that could infect a new season's crop.

Do not re-use old seedling compost as disease organisms may be present and the nutrients have been mostly used up.

Coffee grounds make an excellent mulch for plants that require acidic soil like blueberries, rhododendrons and roses. Banana skins placed around rose bushes will rot down and provide nutrients

Getting water into peat-based potting mixes isn't easy. For small amounts, put the mix into a plastic bag, add water, and then knead the bag. For larger amounts, use a container such as a wheelbarrow, add the mix, then scoop out a centre hole and add warm (not cold) water, continually blending. Never add the mix to water; instead, always add water to the mix

A light sprinkling of fertiliser between layers of added compost will aid in decomposition and replace the nitrogen used in breaking down raw materials into compost.