

Working with Weeds

Compost is best when it is made up of the greatest variety of plant material.

Many of the plants we think of as weeds are native plants, ideally suited to the conditions in your garden. The nutrition they contain is of great value. By composting them you will get the very best fertilizer for your plants – long acting, no risk of overfeeding, promotes steady healthy growth.

Organic gardening works by feeding the soil not the plants.

A few examples of important minerals from weeds:

Silica which promotes disease resistance in plants is made available in the soil by couch grass, plantains, stinging nettles and horsetails.

Calcium which promotes development of plant cell walls is concentrated by dandelions, corn marigold, shepherd's purse, daisies, stinging nettles and horsetails. Earthworms also make Calcium available, so feed them with grass cuttings.

Nitrogen which promotes healthy foliage is accumulated by clovers, docks, dandelions, grass clippings and stinging nettles.

Phosphorous is needed for good roots and found in buttercup, docks and comfrey.

Iron – A shortage causes plant anemia (weak, pale leaves) Found in buttercups, comfrey, creeping thistle, dandelions, ground ivy, stinging nettles.

Potassium is needed for flower and fruit development and promotes disease resistance. It is found in docks, buttercups, comfrey, couch grass, plantains, stinging nettles and thistles.

Using weeds for compost

Annual weeds and grass cuttings can be added directly.

Some perennial weeds, although valuable, need a little more care before adding to the compost.

It is important to recognize **perennial weeds** and know the time of flowering.

Plants which should be wilted or drowned before adding them to the compost heap:

Ground elder, couch grass, bindweed and any perennials that have set seed.

Ground elder- **don't try to dig up the root**. It will not survive if every bit visible above ground is cut down and placed in a container of water for at least 3 weeks. Treat before flowering which is June to August. Be vigilant and remove any fresh growth weekly. - It is usually introduced to gardens in bought in plants!

Broad leaved Dock makes a very deep tap root which concentrates nutrients not otherwise available. Either cut the top including 4cm of root (before flowering) and wilt the plant. OR if small, pull up the whole plant and wilt in a dry place. Then add to compost. It is mainly spread by seeds. The root left behind will die and add nutrition to the soil. The leaves can be added to the compost anytime so keeping a few plants is OK.

Bindweed (white flower) a perennial which flowers June to September, treat as ground elder. Regular cutting away will weaken the plant. Don't let it flower.

Couch Grass must be removed as completely as possible (pull up gently and the whole root will come up). In dry weather it can be wilted but is best drowned in your weed soup before adding to the compost bin.

Horsetails come from an underground stem or rhizome. Fertile stems appear in spring and ripen around May. The stems can be pulled up and composted in early spring. If pulling up roots wilt if possible. As you cultivate the ground most will not survive.

The soil in your garden is already full of dormant seeds waiting for the right conditions for germination and growth. Many of these seeds are eliminated by the composting process.