



Willow-Weave Your Own Composter

Based on the advice in Simon Akeroyd's book, 'Perfect Compost: A Practical Guide'

Sometimes a large plastic or wooden composter is too big for a garden, and sometimes people think they look unsightly. Why not follow these steps and weave your own composter? You can make it to the size that you need, and even site it in a very small outside space or in amongst some pots or a flower border so it becomes an attractive feature of the garden.

Step 1

Think about the location and size

Composters are best when they are in accessible places for you to nip out to, from the kitchen. Whilst they can be of any size, if – like us – you've chosen to make a composter of 80cm (32in) diameter x 40cm (16in) height, you will probably need about 12 stakes of willow for the uprights and a good bundle for the weavers.

Gardener's tip: It's best to have an almost equal balance of carbon and nitrogen in the composter: so, keep a caddy in the kitchen to collect your tea bags, eggs shells, fruit cores and vegetable peelings to add to your shredded paper and torn up egg boxes.

Step 2

Source the Willow, hazel or dogwood

Maybe you have some already growing in the garden so you can easily harvest some rods – you will need to harvest in the winter when the willow is dormant; and you can store it until needed. But, if not, there are suppliers online. We have used Willow-Weaving Supplier, Kate Sankey of @Westmoss side Farm in Stirling.

Kate's tip: Try to use the thicker bottom bits of the willow for the upright parts of the structure. Then use the thinner willow for weaving between the uprights. If your willow is dry, then you will need to soak it. 1 day per foot of willow rod is the rule of thumb.



Step 3 - Gather the stems

Either visit the Supplier or use secateurs to remove the one-year-old stems which have grown **more than 1 metre (3¼ ft)** long from the shrub to make the sides of the composter.

Kate's Tip: Come and collect your willow from the farm, meet willow weaver Kate and you will see a variety of fedges, domes, sculptures and even a willow labyrinth to inspire you.

Step 4 - Preparation is everything

These rods will be more flexible for weaving if they aren't dry – they will need soaking in water (see Step 2).

Gardener's tip: A pond is great for soaking the rods, but you might instead want to search on www.freecycle.org or www.ilovefreegle.org for an unwanted bath (which you can then plant in afterwards!)

Step 5 - Marking the location

At the location in the garden where you want the composter to be, mark a clear 1.2 metre (4ft) diameter circle in the soil.

Gardener's tip: Visit www.pkc.gov.uk/composting for lots of home composting advice - and the venues stocking free caddies for your food waste. And if you've any composting problems, email WasteAwareness@pkc.gov.uk

Step 6 - Rising from the soil

Bang the 12 stakes into the ground at equal intervals of approximately 30cm (12in) around the edge of the circle so they are at least 1metre (3¼ ft) high above ground.

Kate's Tip: You can trim the tops off at the end. The higher the compost bin the more you can get in!

Step 7 - Weaving around the stakes

Starting at the base – nearest the soil, use the supple one-year old stems, to weave between the upright stakes. Continue until you reach the top keeping the uprights an equal distance apart.

Kate's Tip: You can use a weave called pairing. Poke two weavers behind two uprights. Take the left-hand one and weave in front of one and behind one upright. Repeat with the next one (always take the left-hand weaver). When you run out, poke in another weaver. Always start with the thick end (the butt end).

Step 8 - Start using your composter

Now that your woven composter is completed, you can start to use it immediately. The structure will usually last for two or three years before it will all need replacing.

Gardener's Tip: The same structure can be used as a plant support for flowers like Canterbury Bells.