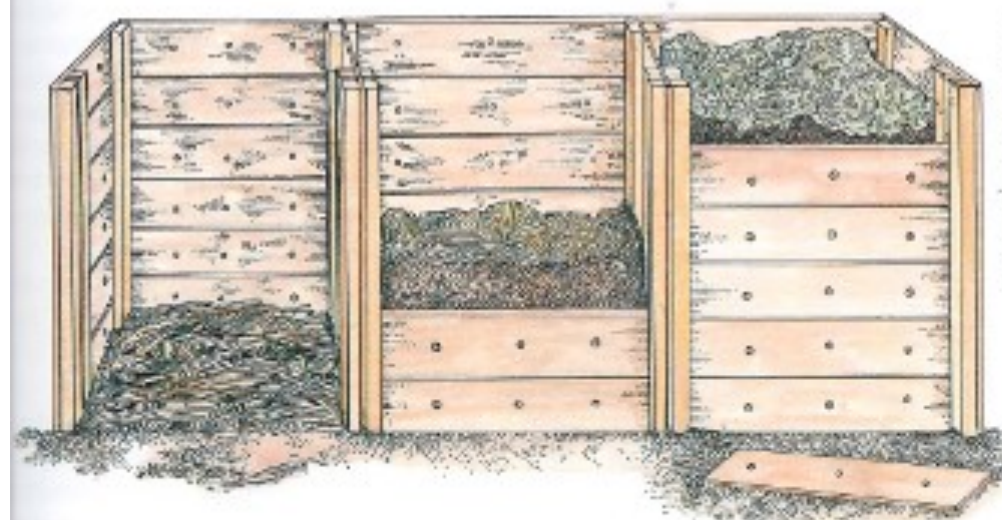


## BUILDING YOUR OWN COMPOST BOX



Homemade boxes are usually cheaper and can be made to measure. It is a good idea to have three boxes side by side, as illustrated, so that the first can be used for fresh waste, the second for part-rotted waste, while using well-rotted compost from the third.

eely, nourishing the bacteria that are getting on with the job of breaking everything down. Although it does not seem to be such common practice today, many gardeners put down brushwood as the first layer, to help the air to circulate through the compost.

Bacteria also need nitrogen. Some will be obtained from the contents of the heap but you want to put as much nitrogen as you can into the soil, so it is a good idea to supplement this. A little farmyard manure is a great benefit. If this is not available you can buy organic fertilizers from most garden centers. The excess can be a bit acid and it helps to add a light sprinkling of ground limestone every foot (30 cm) or so as the heap builds up.

The heap should be moist but not soaked, once it is wet enough to put a lid on it (a sheet of polyethylene will do), both to keep excess in out and to keep heat in. Turning will help aerate the heap and also to bring in to the middle material from the outside of the heap, where it breaks down more slowly. Some commercial compost boxes consist of a barrel which can be rotated on a stand, making it

very easy to mix the ingredients without cooling them down as inevitably happens if you do it with a fork.

If the material is simply thrown into a heap, too much heat escapes and, in wet areas, too much water can enter, which apart from anything else helps to cool it down. However, I generate a lot of compost from my large garden and would need innumerable boxes to keep up with it all. So I stack all the compost, the top layer acting as a thatch to shed excess rain. Because I have so much I tend not to hurry about using it. I will often leave one stack from one year to the next spring, when I turn it, bring all the unrotted material on the outside to the middle, and then use it to plant summer squash on. That autumn I use it on the garden. With boxes it is possible to shorten the cycle between adding material and its re-use, often to as little as ten weeks.

Well-rotted compost which is ready for use is friable (crumbly) and not smelly. With more than one box you can be filling one while another is breaking down and you are using up a third.