

HOW TO USE COMPOST (OR COMPOSTED MANURE) AT DIFFERENT AGES AND STAGES OF MATURITY.

1. RAW COMPOST MATERIALS can be applied directly to decompose in situ where their breakdown will not overwhelm or disrupt plant-growth. A **SHEET MULCH** can be applied to the soil surface around established perennials.

A **BASTARD TRENCH** can be filled with raw materials which will help retain moisture below ground and break down to feed vigorous crops such as runner beans.

2. IMMATURE COMPOST, which is just 4 weeks old and has not yet finished its thermophilic breakdown, can be applied as a surface mulch to feed established annuals or added to soil for vigorous-rooting and fast-growing crops such as squash.

Raw and immature compost can cause denitrification if incorporated in the soil, where the excessive levels of carbon compete with soil micro-organisms for available nitrogen. Adding concentrated nitrogenous fertilisers can compensate. They are both more likely to introduce pests and diseases.

3. MATURE COMPOST (3-6 months old) can be incorporated in the soil 2-3 months before a crop is sown or planted out or used to mulch maturing crops. Can be mixed with soil and concentrated fertilisers into holes under individual plants, for heavy feeders such as tomatoes, peppers, aubergines and celery.

4. MATURE, HUMIFIED VERMICOMPOST, 12 months old, digested by compost worms, can be used for any of the above uses and as an ingredient in potting mixes.

To minimise the risk of introducing pests and diseases, expose maturing compost to the elements and allow vermicompost to dry in a warm and airy place. Material which has been weathered is effectively sterilised and can be used in mixes which are to be used indoors.