

# Sustainability Snapshots



## In the yard

Simple changes can save you \$\$ as well as saving our environment.

### COMPOSTING



**Over half the waste generated in homes can be composted.**

Anything that was once part of a plant or animal can be used in home compost. Weeds, manures, garden waste. (i.e. grass clippings, twigs and leaves), kitchen & household scraps (except meat and fish), soil, wood ash, charcoal, dolomite, lime, tree prunings, torn newspaper, unbleached paper and card board. Other useful ingredients include hair, coffee grounds and tea leaves, seaweed, cut flowers and herbs, old potting mix, vacuum cleaner dust, and torn up pizza boxes. But, **DO NOT** compost dog, cat or human faeces (manure) (they can cause disease), dairy products and fats (though small amounts can be added to the centre of the heap so they break down and do not attract flies, rats or mice), or chemicals (most household and garden chemicals will kill or slow down the living organisms in the compost and soil). Remember, diversity is the key to great compost!

**By composting your food scraps and lawn clippings you can create your own, free fertiliser.**

Composting is nature's own recycling system. It breaks plant matter down into its original nutrient form and then returns that valuable nourishment to the soil. By composting we give back some of the nutrients we have taken from our soil. Putting home-grown compost onto gardens also greatly reduces our dependence on chemicals, such as artificial fertilisers and pesticides. Everything you put into a compost heap is broken down by bacteria and other creatures such as worms and slaters. Air and water also play a crucial role in the life of a compost heap just as they are crucial to human life.

Composting improves sandy or clay soil, helps retain soil moisture and makes plants resilient against pests.

Compost returns nutrients to the soil and improves plant growth by bringing life back to the soil, helping to break up heavy clay soils, improving the soil's capacity to hold water and, adding essential minerals to the soil.

### WORM FARMING

**In a worm farm, happy worms can consume their own body weight in food every day.**

A worm farm can consist of either stackable crates or bins made of plastic, wood or any other lightweight, waterproof material. They take up very little room, do not smell and can even be kept inside. If you're not into building your worm farm, there are various types and sizes available at your local hardware store.

**Worm wee (liquid) and worm poo (castings) are some of the best plant foods available and it's FREE.**

The worms waste materials (castings or vermicast) are great for feeding houseplants, adding to seedling mixes and potting soils or top dressing around plants. It is very concentrated too, so a little can go a long way. The liquid waste is also a power-packed fertilizer that when diluted to a weak tea colour will invigorate your plants.

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## WORM FARMING

**Worms make perfect pets, only requiring shade, moisture and food from your kitchen.**

Worms will eat fruit and vegetables, teabags, crushed egg shells and grass clippings, they will even have some shredded paper that has been soaked in water. They are not so interested in citrus and onion type vegetables but will take them in small quantities. Never give them meat and dairy products. To keep your worms really happy, chop up your scraps into small pieces, be careful not to overfeed (i.e. wait till they are almost out of food before adding more while you work out how much they can eat), keep them slightly moist (but allow drainage as they don't swim very well), and keep them shaded and covered.



## WATER WISE

**Check for leaking outdoor taps - a dripping tap could cost you.**

A dripping tap wastes more than 20,000 litres of water a year. Fixing a leak is simple and cheap, pop down to your local hardware store and they'll be able to give you advice on what you need and how to do it.



**Ask your nursery for low water plants such as natives.**

By choosing plants that are suited to your local soil and weather conditions, you can save water without restricting your choice of garden design. It is also good to group plants by their water needs (i.e. all the thirsty plants together) that way you only need to water certain areas of the garden and plants that don't need it aren't getting over-watered.

**Provide your garden with a thick mulch layer - to hold in the water..**

Mulch is one of the easiest ways to save water in your garden, however to achieve maximum results it needs to be 7-10cm deep. Check the depth and top it up regularly. Plants can become reliant on frequent watering, producing shallow roots. Gradually leave longer periods between watering to get your plants to adjust to drier conditions.

**Install a water tank to collect rainwater from your roof.**

This is a great way to save FREE water from rain till your garden needs it. Water tanks can also be plumbed into your home for use in the toilet and for clothes washing. Hunter Water offers rebates ranging from \$300 to \$650 (depending on the size of the tank being installed) to existing homeowners, for conditions of this rebate call 1300 657 657 for more information.

### For more information and tips check out:

- [www.epa.nsw.gov.au/earthworks/resources.htm](http://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/earthworks/resources.htm)
- [www.lakemac.com.au/ForResidents/waste\\_prod\\_pub.asp](http://www.lakemac.com.au/ForResidents/waste_prod_pub.asp)
- [www.hunterwater.com.au/WaterSavingScheme.asp](http://www.hunterwater.com.au/WaterSavingScheme.asp)

Or contact your local Council:

