

# Dirty Words and How To Use Them

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Below, you'll find a list of words you might stumble upon while doing some composting research. We know because it happened to us. Never fear, we've done the hard part for you (you're welcome) and compiled definitions and useful information for our Posty friends! If we've missed a word or phrase you want to see included, send us an email and we'll get on it!

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**Aeration:** The introduction of air into the material. Moving compost from one side to the next. Aeration is the process by which air is circulated through or mixed with the soil.

**Anaerobic Composting:** Decomposition that occurs using microorganisms that do not require oxygen to survive. In an anaerobic system the majority of the chemical energy contained within the starting material is released as methane.

**Bacteria:** Bacteria are the smallest living organisms and the most numerous in compost; they make up 80 to 90% of the billions of microorganisms typically found in a gram of compost. Bacteria are responsible for most of the decomposition and heat generation in compost. They are the most nutritionally diverse group of compost organisms, using a broad range of enzymes to chemically break down a variety of organic materials.

**Batch Composting:** A method of combining all your organic waste together at once and letting everything sit without adding more materials (other than water). Check and turn your compost system every few days and it will quickly convert organic waste into usable compost. Batch composting often involves some variation of a hot compost "starter" to ensure the mix has enough nitrogen and microbes.

**Bedding:** Bedding is your worms' home, it's their compost oasis in a bin. When vermicomposting your bedding should be soft, able to retain moisture and pH neutral. You will want to use a mixture of materials to allow for oxygen flow. See our supplies list for more information on bedding.

**Biochar:** Charcoal used as a soil amendment for both carbon sequestration and soil health benefits. Biochar is a stable solid, rich in carbon, and can endure in soil for thousands of years.



**Black Gold-** Your finished compost. This nutrient rich soil additive is a gardener's best friend.

**Blanket Composting:** Blanket or sheet composting layers leaves and other compostables on top of the soil, suppressing the existing plant growth and, after decomposition, offering a new, freshly amended bed. (Balz, *Composting for a New Generation*)

**Bokashi:** A process that converts food waste and similar organic matter into a soil amendment which adds nutrients and improves soil texture. It differs from traditional composting methods in that the input matter is fermented by specialist bacteria, not decomposed, among other reasons. Bokashi composting requires only about 10 days to convert organic materials into usable material, and the nutrient value of the material is among the highest of any method of composting.

**Browns** - Carbon materials. Think paper products, the stuff that's going to absorb all your food waste and stop it from smelling. Don't skimp on it. For every portion of brown materials, add one third of green.

**Carbon:** Carbon is the energy source for the compost. It's what gives the composting microbes life. Without a carbon source, the pile of waste would sit in the bin doing nothing, just chillin'. Materials rich in carbon are: brown leaves, straw, wood chips and sawdust, bark, mixed paper (non-glossy), newspaper, corrugated cardboard and pine needles to name a few.

**Compost Activators:** Materials you add to your compost pile other than food scraps and yard trimmings to speed up decomposition. Activators generally add a boost of nitrogen. You can find these activators for free: manure, coffee grounds, grass clippings, old beer and wine.

**Compost Barrel:** A barrel that can be rotated or turned. Often made from recycled plastics, the barrel is filled with organic yard and kitchen wastes. The composting process, contained within the barrel, is activated with commercial starters, manure, already finished compost, garden soil or nothing at all.

**Compost Tea:** Typically when we say "spill the tea" we want the hot gossip, but not in this instance. Compost tea is a concentrated organic liquid fertilizer that is made from steeping biologically active compost in aerated water. Compost tea is nutritionally rich and can help provide plants with beneficial soil bacteria. *Composting for a New Generation, pages 172-173 provide excellent instructions for brewing your own compost tea.*



**Continuous Composting:** In a continuous composting system, the compost is actively managed and waste is added on an ongoing basis. This means you can throw your scraps in as you go and nature takes care of the rest. Vermicomposting is a popular form of continuous composting.

**Decomposition:** The process by which dead organic substances are broken down into simpler organic or inorganic matter; the state or process of rotting; decay.

**Digesters-** These compost systems are designed to be partially buried. Hole in the bottom of the compost drain directly into the earth and its sole exposed opening is the lid, which remains above ground. The subterranean holes also allow the natural decomposition process to occur. Unlike trench composting, harvesting finished compost is easier as the black gold can be directly removed from the bin.

**Grasscycling:** A method of handling grass clippings by leaving them to decompose on the lawn when/after mowing. After mowing the lawn, leave the grass clippings where they fall. This allows all the nitrogen and other nutrients in the clippings to seep into the ground under the grass.

**Greens-** Nitrogen or protein inputs. The kitchen scraps that have been guilting you from the trash for years. They have a new home in your compost. For every portion of green materials, add three of brown.

**Greenhouse Gas:** A gas that absorbs and emits radiant energy within the thermal infrared range. Greenhouse gases cause the greenhouse effect on planets. The primary greenhouse gases in Earth's atmosphere are water vapor, carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, and ozone.

**Harvesting-** The process of separating a finished compost from the bin.

**Hot Composting:** A composting method in which microbial activity within the compost pile is optimized, resulting in finished compost in a much shorter period of time. During hot composting, the compost pile is kept moist and is stirred often to ensure proper aeration.

**Macroorganisms:** Macroorganisms help decomposition in a physical way. Macroorganisms chomp and grind the organic matter into smaller bits, as well as eat other organisms to keep the populations fresh. They help to break down particles in the pile and contribute manure.



**Microorganisms:** In the process of composting, microorganisms use chemicals to break down organic matter (food scraps) and produce carbon dioxide, water, heat, and humus, the organic component of soil (your compost end product).

**Manure:**

1. Organic matter that is used as **organic fertilizer** in **agriculture**. Most manure consists of animal **feces**.
2. Compost manure: organic matter that has been decomposed in by composting.

**Organic Matter:** Matter that has come from a recently living organism. It is capable of decay or is the product of decay; or is composed of organic compounds.

**pH:** Represents the relative acidity or basicity of a water-containing solution.

**Sheet composting:** See “Blanket Composting”

**Trench Composting:** A way of composting by burying food scraps directly in the garden. This method of composting is effective for materials that attract rodents such as meat, dairy, breads and cooked foods. It is also a safe way to compost pet waste.

**Tumblers-** These fully enclosed compost systems are used when hot composting and are great for patios and gardens alike. The compost bin relies on being turned (or tumbled) to allow air in for the decomposition process.

**Turning-** The process of introducing air to a compost bin by mixing the contents.

**Vermicomposting:** Also known as worm composting; is an easy composting process that requires only a few components: some red wiggler worms, a ventilated bin, bedding for the worms to live in, food for the worms, and some time to harvest their nutrient rich castings. (*Vermicomposting is your Posty family’s first foray into composting!*)



# Worm Clubhouse

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Hey all you trashy people, welcome to the worm clubhouse. This is our ever growing glossary to make sure we can understand what's going on in our bin. We're here to talk wormy.

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**African Nightcrawler** - In case the name wasn't a clear give a way, these guys are a long way from home. These worms can eat up to 150% times their body weight daily. This appetite is a major advantage if you're trying to move through leftovers quickly.

**Castings:** AKA, vermicast. Straight up, this is worm poo. Castings are an organic form of fertilizer (manure) produced by worms.

**Cocoon-** These pin sized sacks are actually worm eggs! Each golden colored cocoon can hold up to 20 worm eggs.

**Red Wiggler-** Say hello to the OG of composting worms. These little guys put the vermi in vermicomposting. Under the right conditions Red wigglers will eat half either body weight daily.

**Vermicomposting:** Also known as worm composting; is an easy composting process that requires only a few components: some red wiggler worms, a ventilated bin, bedding for the worms to live in, food for the worms, and some time to harvest their nutrient rich castings. (*Vermicomposting is your Posty family's first foray into composting!*)

**Worm Leachate** - Often mistaken for compost tea, this liquid is run off from a vermicomposting solution. It's often a sign that the conditions in the bin have become too wet. This can be used on plants though it should not be used on those producing food.

**Worm Towers/Flow Through Systems-** Unlike your single tupperware bin, these contraptions are stacked. The idea is to fill the bins from the bottom up. As the worms finish the food in one bin, they instinctively move up to the next. This speeds up the harvesting process.

