

Is it done yet?

Simple checks for compost maturity

Compost should be dark, crumbly, with no recognisable food.
Compost should have an earthy smell.

...but these two indicators alone are not enough!

If you know your compost is already a year or two old, you don't have to worry. But if you are trying to get compost into your garden quickly, it's best to take a little time to test it further.

Two additional tests are described below:

I - The Jar Test



Put some compost in a bottle.



Add water to make it soggy.



Seal the bottle tightly.



Leave it alone for a week.



Open the bottle (carefully!) and check for odor.



If it smells like nice wet earth, then the compost is done.

If you notice bad odors then it means that the materials in the compost were not sufficiently decomposed and anaerobic organisms have gone to work on the nutrients that remain. These anaerobes produce unpleasant odors as a by-product, so bad smells indicate that the compost is not done yet.

Using compost before it is ready can damage plants. Undecayed 'brown' materials in the soil can temporarily reduce plant-available nitrogen. Undecayed 'green' materials can harbour pests and diseases. Immature compost can also introduce weeds, seeds and root damaging organic acids.

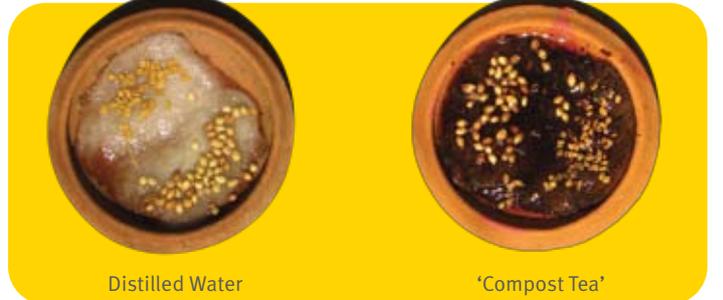
II - The Sapling Test



Mix equal amounts of compost and water and let it sit for five minutes while stirring occasionally.



Pour the 'tea' into another container. (The remaining solids can be returned to your compost pile.)



Soak a few methi and dhaniya seeds in the 'compost tea' and an equal number in distilled water for 2-3 minutes. Lay them on dampened cotton on a flat surface; keeping it moist and warm. Check the seeds every 3-4 days.



Here the water-treated seeds have germinated faster while the seeds in the tea have not shown progress. This means that the compost has not aged enough and is not done yet.



All "not done yet" compost should be kept in a container which is aerated and should be kept moist for at least 2 months before using it on plants.
Add accelerator to expedite the process of maturation.

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