



Householders' Options to Protect the Environment Inc.

PO Box 6118 – Clifford Gardens, TOOWOOMBA QLD 4350

(22 Vacy Street, Toowoomba QLD 4350)

Ph 07 4639 2135; Email: office@hopeaustralia.org.au

Website: www.hopeaustralia.org.au

Facebook: www.facebook.com/Householders.Options.to.Protect.the.Environment

ABN 48 036 173 161

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The Value of Compost: Building Healthier Soils for a More Sustainable Future

Written by Fidelia, HOPE Researcher WA



There is something surprisingly hopeful about compost.

It doesn't usually make the news, and it probably isn't the first thing that comes to mind when we think about protecting the environment. Yet every day, in kitchens, backyards and community gardens across Australia, ordinary people are doing something extraordinary. They are turning what many of us think of as rubbish into something that helps life grow.

Most of us rarely think about what happens after we throw away a banana peel, coffee grounds, or vegetable scraps. Once the bin lid closes, it is easy to believe the story ends there.

But in reality, it is only just beginning.

Every day, organic materials that could nourish the earth are instead buried deep in landfills beneath layers of household rubbish and other discarded materials. Without access to oxygen, they break down differently, releasing methane, a potent greenhouse gas that contributes to climate change. Yet those same food scraps and garden

clippings could become rich, living compost that restores soils, supports biodiversity, helps grow healthy food, and strengthens the natural systems on which we all depend.

Compost reminds us that nature doesn't see waste the way we often do. In nature, nothing is truly wasted. Leaves become soil, fallen branches nourish fungi, and yesterday's plants help tomorrow's forests grow. Composting simply works with this natural cycle, turning yesterday's leftovers into tomorrow's soil.

As Australia faces growing environmental challenges such as soil degradation, biodiversity loss, climate change, and increasing landfill volumes, composting is emerging as one of the simplest yet most effective ways that households and communities can make a positive difference.

1. How Composting Works



Composting is simply nature's recycling system. Tiny organisms such as bacteria, fungi, insects and worms quietly break down food scraps, garden clippings and other organic materials into a dark, crumbly material known as compost.

This natural process has been taking place for millions of years. In forests, fields and gardens, fallen leaves, branches and other organic matter are constantly broken down and returned to the earth, where they become part of the next cycle of growth.

Composting simply allows us to work with this natural process rather than sending organic materials to a landfill. Rather than becoming waste, they are transformed into a valuable resource that can be returned to the soil.

2. Why Healthy Soil Matters



Healthy soil doesn't always receive the attention it needs. Perhaps, it's time we gave it the recognition it deserves.

We admire forests, gardens, and farms, but rarely think about what makes them possible.

Beneath our feet lies one of nature's most remarkable living systems. Rich, healthy soil grows our food, filters water, stores carbon, provides habitat for wildlife, and forms the foundation of thriving ecosystems.

Far more than simply dirt, soil is a living community of microorganisms, fungi, insects, worms and organic matter, all working together to recycle nutrients and support plant growth.

When soils lose organic matter through erosion, pollution, or intensive land use, they become less productive and more vulnerable to drought and extreme weather. Compost helps restore these natural processes by returning valuable nutrients and organic carbon to the soil. Regular applications of compost can improve soil structure, increase water retention, reduce erosion, encourage beneficial microorganisms, promote healthier plant growth, and reduce reliance on synthetic fertilisers.

Healthy soils are not only essential for agriculture, but they also strengthen ecosystems, parks, forests, waterways, and communities.

3. Why Waste Isn't Really Waste



Every day, large amounts of fruit peels, coffee grounds, eggshells, grass clippings, leaves, and other organic materials from households, restaurants, cafés, and the food industry end up in landfills. Buried beneath layers of rubbish, they decompose without oxygen and produce methane rather than healthy compost.

Where most people see rubbish, nature sees future soil. Sometimes, protecting the environment begins with nothing more than changing the way we see waste.

Composting gives those organic materials the chance to return to the earth where they belong. Instead of ending their journey in a landfill, they begin a new one as healthy soil.

It's one of the simplest examples of a circular economy in everyday life:

Food → Compost → Healthy Soil → New Growth

It's a simple cycle, yet it reminds us of something important: what we call "waste" is often simply a resource in the wrong place. By doing so, compost reduces waste while supporting healthier ecosystems and more resilient communities.

4. Getting Started is Easier Than You Think



The good news is that composting doesn't have to be difficult. You don't need a large backyard, expensive equipment or years of gardening experience. Whether you use a compost bin, a worm farm or your local [Food Organics and Garden Organics \(FOGO\)](#) collection service, there are many simple ways to recycle organic materials.

Every handful of food scraps diverted from landfill reduces methane emissions while creating nutrient-rich compost that supports healthier soils, gardens and ecosystems.

Composting isn't about getting everything right from the start. It's simply about making one small choice today that helps create a healthier environment tomorrow.

5. Working Together for a Circular Future



Households aren't doing this alone. Local councils, community organisations, and governments are encouraging people to work together to reduce organic waste and are increasingly recognising that food and garden waste is too valuable to throw away.

Across Australia, more councils are introducing [Food Organics and Garden Organics \(FOGO\)](#) collections and expanding green waste services. These programs allow food scraps and garden waste to be processed into compost rather than being buried in a landfill.

Governments are also increasingly recognising the environmental value of recovering organic waste. In New South Wales, the [FOGO mandates and rollout](#), commencing in July 2026, require many businesses and institutions to implement source-separated food organics collection, with further stages extending through 2030. This reflects a growing national focus on reducing landfill waste and recovering valuable organic resources.

Although waste systems vary across Australia, the overall direction is clear: organic waste is increasingly recognised as an important resource rather than something to throw away.

Building healthier soils requires collaboration between households, communities, businesses, researchers, industry, and governments.

Organisations such as the [International Compost Alliance \(ICA\)](#) and the [Australian Organics Recycling Association \(AORA\)](#) support education, research, innovation, and best practice in composting and organics recycling.

Businesses are also developing new approaches to reducing food waste, recovering valuable materials, and improving circular resource management. Recent developments, including stronger organics collection programs and improved recycling standards, demonstrate growing recognition of compost's role within Australia's circular economy.

Together, these efforts are helping create more efficient waste systems while supporting healthier soils and more sustainable communities.

6. Compost's Role in Climate Action



Climate action is often associated with renewable energy, electric vehicles, and emissions reduction. However, healthy soil also plays an important role. By storing carbon, retaining water and supporting resilient ecosystems, it is one of nature's greatest allies in building a more resilient future.

By keeping organic waste out of landfills, composting helps reduce methane emissions while enriching the soil. It also improves the soil's ability to retain water, supports biodiversity, and helps store carbon in the soil.

For farmers, healthier soils can improve crop productivity and resilience during dry periods. For gardeners, compost creates healthier plants and reduces the need for chemical fertilisers. For communities, compost contributes to greener parks, stronger ecosystems, and more sustainable food systems.

Sometimes, meaningful environmental action begins with something as simple as where we place our food scraps. What we throw away today could help grow tomorrow's harvest.

7. A Different Way of Thinking



Compost reminds us that positive change often begins with simple, everyday decisions. While environmental challenges can often feel overwhelming, it encourages us to think differently about waste.

Rather than asking, "What do I throw away?"

We can begin asking, "What can be used again?"

That small change in thinking is at the heart of sustainability.

Every compost bin started, every worm farm maintained, every FOGO bin used correctly, and every handful of compost returned to the soil contributes to a healthier environment.

At [Householders' Options to Protect the Environment \(HOPE\) Inc. \(Australia\)](#), we believe caring for the environment often begins with informed action and practical, everyday choices. Composting is one of those choices. It connects households, communities, farmers, businesses, and governments through a shared goal of reducing waste and caring for the land.

The next time you scrape leftovers from your plate or sweep leaves from the garden, consider what comes next.

What seems like waste today could become something valuable tomorrow, helping to grow flourishing gardens, restore landscapes and produce the food we depend on. Sometimes, the future of our environment begins with what we choose not to throw away.