

NATURE'S WAY

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DIY INSTANT COMPOST TEA

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STARTER & APPLICATION for GARDENERS

Please first read *DIY Instant Compost Tea – Introduction*
<https://tinyurl.com/mvecbpm2>

The starter combines local soil biology with a growing medium and foods to multiply the biology. Gardeners can apply this starter directly to the garden, see below.

The soil biology can be further multiplied by brewing. Gardeners who want larger volumes of brew for larger areas or to control diseases may follow this Starter factsheet and then the factsheet *Brewing for Gardeners*. Farmers will also require large volumes for large areas. See factsheets for Farmers.

Starter

Step 1 – Collect local soil biology

Collect local soil biology from undisturbed areas with long term mulches. Avoid areas that are cultivated or have had fertilizers or chemicals applied. Look under mulches, along fences, near compost bins, maybe a friend's garden or local creek. The soil needs to have a surface mulch and beneath that a crumbly layer of fine mulch and crumbly soil.

Push aside the mulch (the layer of dead leaves and sticks) and collect the crumbly 1-2 cm layer which is the active layer. Collect about a litre just in case something goes wrong at first.



Photo 1 type of collecting area

In front of bucket:
- mulch removed.

In front of shovel:
- active crumb layer
collected and firm soil
now showing



Photo 2 Soil after collecting, mulch removed

Store in a moist condition. Avoid being water logged or drying out.

Step 2 - **Mixing** a Starter for 10 – 40 square metres.

Uniformly mix:

- 3 L fresh worm casts,
- 1 L Mill Run - bran and pollard, high in minerals and energy, - available as chook-food from produce stores,
- 50 ml molasses or 50 ml sugar dissolved in warm water for evenness of distribution.
- 300 ml local soil collected in Step 1.,

Once mixed, add water till just able to squeeze a drop of water, not wetter. This may need around 0.5 – 1 litre.

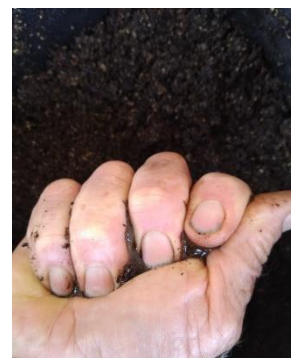


Photo 3 Squeeze until a droplet appears

Step 3 – **Growth phase**

Place the mix 8 – 10 cm deep, on the ground in a cardboard box or tray with drainage. Compress it gently, like compressing soil around seedlings. Excess compaction will exclude air and stop desirable biology growing.

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Cover with a wet cloth to maintain humidity. Twice a day rewet the cloth in a bucket of water, wring it out and put back over the starter.

A slight warming will occur after 12 – 24 hours which indicates strong biological activity. This is important to check for warming as this indicates all is going well.

Step 4 – Check if ready to apply

This may be after 24 hours in summer or 48 or more hours in winter.

When fungi cover the surface, break through the Starter to the bottom and check that the fungi have grown throughout the medium. If you can see white or grey threads throughout the starter, it is ready. If not, wait another day.



Left:
Two days
after starting



Right:
Close up

Application for immediate use

Soak the completed Starter for only 10 minutes in 10 L of water. Break any lumps in the mix with your hands.

Add additional water and apply to your garden.
This Starter is suitable for 10 – 40 square metres.

A watering can **without** a nozzle will minimise blockages while applying and maximise entry into the soil away from sunlight. Additional watering by hose may be beneficial.

The biology lives in the soil and is killed by sunlight. Water in by hose after the application to wash the biology into the soil.

The biology will grow and spread fast in your soil. Treatment rows may be spaced. Biology may grow 2 metres in the soil in 100 days.



Summary of key points

- Use only soil from areas that have not been cultivated or sprayed.
- Keep this collected soil moist and cool before use.
- Check by hand that there is warming about 12 hours after wetting the starter.
- Keep the covering cloth damp twice a day.
- Prevent the mix from getting too wet by protecting it from rain, sprinklers and hand-held hoses.
- When the fungi covers the Starter, check that it has also spread to the base.
- If not, wait another 24 hours and allow to grow further.
- When using the Starter directly, soak it in water for no longer than 10 minutes.
- After applying this with a watering can, water it in.

The starter will keep for a few days if kept moist and cool.
Have fun and happy growing.

For further information: <https://tinyurl.com/mvecbpm2>
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