

Bokashi cheatsheet

Bokashi bins are a fermentation system that are great for dealing with cooked food and animal products (meat, fish and dairy scraps) although they are suitable for all waste. They work a little differently to other composting methods. This cheat sheet will help you set one up and get a system in place.

Step 1: Getting started with your Bokashi bin

Bokashi bins have a tightly sealed lid and a tap which is kept closed, so they do not smell and can be kept indoors. However, if you prefer to keep it outside or on a balcony, they will work perfectly there too. Choose whichever is most practical for you. Ensure the tap is screwed shut.

It's worth considering what you'll do with the contents once the Bokashi bin is full before you start using it. Once the bin is full (which will take several weeks) it will need emptying. The contents can be buried or added to an existing compost bin. A full Bokashi bin can be stored for several months. Some people choose to use a two-bin system, meaning that when one bin is full they can begin filling the second bin without having to empty the first immediately.

As well as one or two Bokashi bins, you will also need Bokashi bran (a bran that has been inoculated with microbes). Despite bran often having a use-by date, in my experience it will last several months (if not years) after the date. A potato masher or similar is recommended to compress the bin contents as it is filled.

Step 2: Adding food scraps to the Bokashi bin

To use the Bokashi bin, remove the lid and add food scraps. Once the bottom of the bin is covered, add a sprinkling of Bokashi bran. If you have more food scraps, repeat this process, layering the scraps with the bran. Once finished, replace the lid immediately. Add more scraps as they become available.

Step 3: Draining the liquid

After a few days, liquid will drain from the food scraps into the reservoir at the bottom of the bucket. This can be collected by opening the tap. It is the colour of honey and has a strong, sour smell. This liquid is full of beneficial bacteria but is also very potent. It makes a great toilet and drain cleaner. It can be added to the garden sparingly but should be diluted 10:1 with water, and only used on established plants as it will burn young roots.

Step 4: Layering the Bokashi bin

Unlike compost bins and worm farms, the food scraps will not transform visually and will continue to look like food. They will not reduce much in size. A sour smell will develop which is due to the fermenting. White mould may appear and this is also part of the process. When opening the bin to add additional scraps, press the contents down with the potato masher to squeeze out excess liquid and remove air. Depending on how many food scraps are being added to the bucket, and their water content, a Bokashi bucket will fill up in 4-12 weeks.

Step 5: Burying the Bokashi bucket contents

Once a Bokashi bucket is full, the contents need to be buried. If you do not require the bucket immediately, it can be left (up to several months).

For the first few weeks, continue to drain the liquid. The easiest way to deal with the contents is to add to an existing compost bin. Although the Bokashi bin contents may contain meat, fish and dairy scraps, the fermenting process means this is fine to be placed in a compost bin.

Another option is to use a large plant pot, add a layer of soil to the bottom, add the Bokashi bucket contents and top with a good layer of soil. Because it is acidic, wait a few weeks before planting anything in the pot. Finally, the contents can be buried in a hole in the ground, and covered with soil.

Step 6: Readyng the Bokashi bucket for re-use

After burying the contents, the Bokashi bin will need a good rinse. Also check that there is no debris in the tap. Bokashi buckets are generally made of plastic, and the fermentation microbes may inoculate the plastic, meaning you need less bran for future uses. Experiment, and if you notice the sour smell you will know that it is working.

Tips for getting the most out of your Bokashi bin

Whereas other home composting systems encourage biodiversity and are living systems, bokashi systems have specific conditions. They are anaerobic, meaning they do not require oxygen, and they rely on microorganisms alone.

- ✓ Keep your Bokashi bin in a shady spot and out of direct summer sunlight.
- ✓ Remember to seal the lid tightly and ensure the tap is closed between uses.
- ✓ Put food scraps into the bin as soon as you can, or alternatively store in the fridge or freezer until you are ready to add to the Bokashi bucket, to avoid introducing eggs or flies to the bin.
- ✗ Do not add water to the bokashi bin. There is enough moisture in the food scraps for the process to work.
- ✗ Do not add composting worms or other insects to the bin. The bran provides the microorganisms required to ferment the contents.
- ✗ It is not recommend that you store bokashi liquid, but if you do, label the jar clearly and use it us as soon as possible.