



Composting

CHRONICLE

Autumn/Winter 2014

Hello and welcome to the autumn/winter 2014 Composting Chronicle

As the days start to shorten again and the steady stream of grass clippings & hedge trimmings begins to slow down, many of us find we have a full bin ready to harvest. Inside you'll find an article giving lots of tips on what to do – and when – with all this rich compost.

We've also got a report on the training weekend for the latest group of Leicestershire Master Composters; one couple's thoughts on their favourite composter and an update on progress at the new compost demonstration site at The Green Place in Sileby (don't forget you can also see the original compost demonstration site at Snibston Discovery Museum).

Finally, this is the first e-mail only edition so we've altered the layout a bit and we've included a survey to find out a little bit more about what you think of the Chronicle and what else (if anything) you'd like to see in it.

Look out for seasonal composting tips on our Facebook page www.facebook.com/LeicestershireRecycling to help keep your bins and heaps going throughout the autumn & winter.



What if we could only have one compost bin?

By Anne & Tony Croft, Master Composters & Waste Action Volunteers



We have had our Green Johanna for five years now and it enables us to compost a whole range of materials to produce good quality, year-round compost.

We put in food waste, including meat, fish, bones (which need smashing up once composted and dried afterwards, to make bone meal) and dairy products, along with garden waste, shredded paper, toilet roll centres etc.

The bin is best sited in the shade, close to the kitchen for convenience if at all possible. Aerating the compost in the bin is really easy, simply use a broom handle or the supplied "stirrer" to create holes down into the compost. Although the winter jacket is optional we would advocate getting one as this keeps the bin working as a hot composter even in the cold months. Don't forget to remove it in the spring and summer to stop the bin from overheating!

Using the Green Johanna we are able to dispose of food waste immediately. This means no more smelly bins in the kitchen or a stinking dustbin containing old food full of maggots in the summer. Yes, we get a few fruit flies, but that's not a problem.

Green Johanna's cone shaped design ensures compost does not stick to the sides of the compost bin, but always sinks down towards the centre, allowing air to circulate and oxygenating the compost. Air circulation can be regulated by turning the lid, allowing you to control the temperature of your compost whatever the season, accelerating compost production even more. Green Johanna's perforated base plate encourages air circulation, and allows worms to enter the composter whilst keeping out vermin. Four inward facing vents leading in from the base plate encourage air upwards into the composter. It's also easy to empty the mature compost from the large doors.

For us it's the "Rolls Royce" of bins and deals with all our biodegradable waste and we would recommend it to anyone serious about minimising waste and reducing their carbon footprint.



Progress at the new compost corner

In the autumn/winter 2013 chronicle we introduced the new compost demonstration site at the Green Place in Sileby. It's been up and running for a year now, so Master Composter David Cannon talks us through the progress so far.



This year was the first spring for the new compost demonstration site at the Green Place in Sileby. The site has been finished for just over 12 months with the addition of information boards which explain about the different composters and other displays, which include:

- ✓ Keyhole garden
- ✓ Different sized Blackwall bins
- ✓ Green cone food waste digester
- ✓ New Zealand box compost bins
- ✓ A wormery
- ✓ Leaf cages



The project yielded 12 large wheelbarrows full of good quality soil conditioner for the garden, with even more expected next spring.

A Master Composter is available on most Friday afternoons if you have any composting questions, so please feel free to drop in and have a look round.

The Green Place is open
Wednesday to Saturday
10am until 4pm from March
to December.

For further details visit
www.completewasters.co.uk



How to make the best of your compost

So, it's the end of a glorious summer, and your compost bins are full to bursting. Time to spread it all around your veg plot or allotment, ready for next season. Well, actually no... compost is a precious resource and a bit of planning and thinking about where it is best deployed can mean you get the best from it.

So, first of all, don't spread it now. Wait until the spring – store it in old compost bags if you need to empty the bin. Compost spread in the autumn will lose lots of nutrients as winter rain drains through it. Compost spread in the spring, just a week or so before sowing or transplanting your crops, will supply most of its nutrients to the crops. And speaking of leaching, if you leave the compost in the bin, be sure to cover it over with something – even an old compost bag or rug will keep a lot of rain off.

Some crops can make more use of compost than others. Potatoes and brassicas are the hungriest, so use it where you plan to grow these crops. All the cucurbit family (courgettes, pumpkins and other squash, ~~cucumbers~~) will make good use of your compost too. However, most root crops, like carrots, beetroot and parsnips, hate too much fertility and will respond by growing lots of leaves and smaller roots. Alliums (onions, shallots, leeks) don't like too much fertility either. For this reason, avoid using it where you plan to grow these crops.

You would think that salads would benefit from this boost to green leaves, but it really doesn't make much difference to such an undemanding plant. By all means use it on your salad beds if you have enough, but don't prioritise it.

A classic crop to use it on is for beans and peas. This is fine if you have extra compost, but the pea and bean family can fix nitrogen themselves from the air, and don't need the extra fertility provided by compost. They do enjoy a soil rich in organic matter though, but this can be provided from leafmould, green waste compost (available from some councils) or even from buried newspaper and cardboard. So don't waste your compost here.

As well as in the vegetable garden, you can use it in the fruit garden. Any bare rooted fruit bushes, trees or canes you are planting through the winter will enjoy a soil enriched with compost. You can also use it to mulch around your fruit beds, but wait until the spring for this, so the plants actually take up and use the fertility.

Potatoes



Sunflowers



Courgettes



In your ornamental areas, use it around herbaceous perennials as they start to shoot in the spring. Roses love it too, as a mulch in April or May. Like vegetable crops, some annuals, such as sunflowers, will really benefit from a composted bed, but others, such as cosmos, will respond with a flush of greenery and very few flowers (don't ask me how I found that out!)

When using it on areas where you plan to sow annual crops, spread it about 1-2cm deep – no need to dig it in, the worms will do that for you. Mulching around established plants can be more generous – about 10cm deep.

It can also be used as an ingredient in home-made potting composts, for things such as tomatoes and summer bedding. For a completely home-made mix, combine equal parts compost, leafmould and garden soil. However, I don't know about you, but I don't have a ready supply of garden soil available, so I mix 1 part of my compost to 2 parts peat-free multi-purpose compost from the garden centre. This **eeeks** out the expensive bought-in compost and provides a slow-release fertiliser for the plants.

So, to summarise – spread it in spring; on potato, brassica, and cucurbit beds; or around herbaceous perennials. Or use it in potting mixes for hungry plants like tomatoes and bedding plants. Obviously if you grow potatoes, brassicas or cucurbits in pots, it's great for them too.

Carrie Pailthorpe
Public Health Analyst,
Leicestershire County Council

Formerly Senior Horticultural Advisor,
Garden Organic



Master Composter training weekend

8 new Master Composters join the Leicestershire network

Volunteers from Coventry, Leicestershire and Solihull gathered at Ryton Organic Gardens in June for a weekend's induction training for the Master Composter Programme. The volunteers prepared to get out and about to share their passion for composting and the diversion of waste from landfill.

The weekend's activities included learning about how waste is dealt with both locally and nationally; the process of composting, what you can put in your compost bin and the various different methods of composting. In addition to this they worked to design their perfect compost bin, practiced selling different types of composter ~~to each other~~ and got to know each other as a team. There was also plenty of time to explore the delights of Ryton Gardens.

Master Composters are a group of volunteers who donate at least thirty hours of their time to promote home composting on behalf of Leicestershire County Council. If you'd like to book them to run a stall at an event, to give a talk or would just like some advice, you can contact them via [www.waste prevention@leics.gov.uk](mailto:waste prevention@leics.gov.uk) or on 0116 305 7005.

We're not currently recruiting any more Master Composters but if you'd like to join the scheme at a later date, contact us on the number or e-mail address above and we'll add you to our list. We are currently recruiting for our Waste Action Volunteers scheme – this scheme is more broadly-based, covering recycling, food waste reduction and reuse as well as home composting. Again, contact us for more details or an application form.

By John Levison
& David Garrett
(Garden Organic)



Composting Chronicle reader survey

As we've made some changes to the way you can receive the Composting Chronicle, we thought we should also find out a bit about why you subscribe, what you read and if there's anything else you'd like to see. The questions we'd like to ask are:

1. How did you first find out about the Rot-a-Lot Club?
2. Why did you join the Rot-a-Lot Club?
3. Do you home compost?
4. If yes, what do you compost?
5. Does the Composting Chronicle help you to continue home composting?
6. Do you make use of the information & advice in the Composting Chronicle?
7. Which articles do you read in the Chronicle?
8. What sort of other articles would you like to see?
9. Do you think that two six-monthly editions per year of the Composting Chronicle are...
10. Would you be willing to pay to continue to be a member of the Rot-a-Lot club?

To complete the survey, please go to
www.leics.gov.uk/rot_a_lot_composting_club
before Friday 31st October 2014.

Please enter your contact details if you'd like
to be included in a prize draw to win a Green
Johanna hot composter.



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