



Composting

CHRONICLE

Spring/Summer 2014



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DON'T
forget
to compost
your chronicle

Hello & welcome to the spring/summer 2014 Composting Chronicle.

Once again, the busy part of the year has come round when there are plenty of opportunities to use the compost your bins and heaps have produced and, as the weather warms up, they will start working more quickly and get hungry again.

In this issue, we've got important news about the future of the Composting Chronicle and a feature on our Master Composter programme – we're doing some more recruitment this spring and this will give you an idea of what you could be getting up to if you'd like to join in. There are also articles on what you can safely compost when pests and diseases strike and the Hotbin, a hot composter that will take both food and garden waste. Finally, there are details of a poster painting competition for Compost Awareness Week.

We'd like to thank everyone that contributed material and, as always, if you have any questions or would like to suggest an article for the next edition of the Composting Chronicle please send them in to recycle@leics.gov.uk

Could you be a

Master Composter?



We are currently recruiting Leicestershire residents to become volunteer Master Composters.

To become a Master Composter you must have an interest in gardening and reducing the amount of organic waste that goes to landfill.

New recruits will need to attend initial training for a weekend in May at Ryton Gardens (Garden Organic's centre); then be able to donate a minimum of 30 hours of their time over the following 12 months to help spread the composting message.

Master Composters can use their own skills and enthusiasm to choose how they would like to raise awareness of the benefits of home composting, encourage more people to home compost and assist people with any queries.

You could

- Attend events and roadshows.
- Write articles or blogs.
- Set up a website.
- Give talks and presentations.
- Set up a composting club at your local school/community group or organisation.

Whatever you choose to do, you will have the support of a dedicated volunteer co-ordinator and a large array of resources to help you out.

As well as receiving the initial training, benefits include membership of Garden Organic, an annual celebration event and opportunities for further training as well as the chance to make new friends and help the environment.

We asked a few Master Composters what they got out of being part of the scheme...

"My guiding principle for 30 years or so has been that, for most of us, the best place to make a positive impact on the environment is where we live, where we work and where we play. Being a Master Composter is my way of doing that and helping others to do the same."

David Cannon

"I was in the first batch of recruits in 2008 and found myself surrounded by like-minded people, some of whom have become friends. I have learnt such a lot through the scheme, not just about composting, but also about recycling, reusing and food waste. You do not have to be an expert to join the scheme. There is excellent training and constant support. I still regularly receive updated factsheets to improve my knowledge. I am really glad I became a Master Composter and would encourage anyone with an interest in composting to join."

Jane Redfearn

"What I get out of being a Master Composter: meeting similar minded, inspiring colleagues who give of themselves tirelessly to promote composting; meeting and greeting the public who can also be inspiring (at times!) and also the training, support and appreciation of LCC – we are kept well-informed and the scheme is well-organised."

Sue Blockley

DID YOU KNOW...?

Since the Master Composter scheme was set up in 2008, 84 people have joined the scheme and completed the training course. Between them, they've gone on to put in over 6,000 hours and had contact with over 35,000 people, promoting the benefits of home composting.

If you're a Leicestershire resident, aged 18 or over and would like to find out more download an application form or go to www.lesswaste.org.uk/master_composter

Important chronicle news..

Composting Chronicle is going digital. In order to reduce both cost and waste we will be producing the chronicle electronically from now on. If you've been receiving it by post, we'll be very happy to send it to you by e-mail in future. Just send an e-mail with the subject header "Composting Chronicle – e-mail" to customerservices@leics.gov.uk with confirmation of your name and address (so we can ensure we're updating the correct set of details) and we'll do the rest. If you've moved house in the last three years, please also include your previous address.

If you're not able to receive it by e-mail you'll be able to see it on the Leicestershire Waste Partnership website at

www.lesswaste.org.uk/rot-a-lot



Pests and Disease

By **Carrie Pailthorpe**, Formerly Senior Horticultural Advisor, Garden Organic

How often have you read that any plants suffering with a certain disease should be burnt? Do you bother to light a fire just to burn a few potato leaves? Or just chuck them into the general bin to be sent for landfill? Best not compost them, anyway...

Well, the good news is that lots of this advice is plain wrong! Much of it was written in the 'Dig for Victory' years and coal fires were pretty common – so a precautionary approach was adopted, when open fires were in almost every home.

But think about it for a minute. Most plant diseases are bacterial or fungal in nature, live in the soil, air or in water. Ones that live in the air can safely be composted as the disease micro-organisms will die as the plant material decomposes. There's no benefit to be had by burning the material as the spores or bacteria are all around in the air we, and our plants, breathe. So, what should you be more careful with? Basically, anything that is soil or water borne – these can survive the composting process and as you spread the compost around your plants, you spread disease

too. Soil-borne diseases are by far the worst and most pernicious, but luckily these are few and far between. The dreaded club root is one example – this attacks plants in the brassica (cabbage) family, and severely stunts their growth or even kills them. It is easily spread on boots and tools, and must not be composted. However, I still wouldn't advocate a bonfire. Again, this kind of material can usually be added to council compost collections as their process will kill off the fungus that causes club root.

Black spot of roses is another example of a disease (water-borne this time) that can survive the home composting process so add it to your garden waste bin.

Bear in mind that some pests will also overwinter in the soil – allium leaf miner is one such culprit. So if you compost anything suffering with this type of infestation, the larvae may well spend the winter in your compost heap and be re-emerging about now, looking for tasty onions and garlic to devour. Again, add this type of material to your garden waste bin, rather than your home bin.



Here a couple of examples of common garden pests and disease

So, in short, there's no need to burn any diseased plant material. But do think carefully about how to deal with it. If you are confident of your diagnosis, then add anything air-borne to your home-heap, and anything else to the garden waste bin. If you're not confident of your diagnosis, maybe this is the year to improve your knowledge. The RHS have some excellent resources - <http://apps.rhs.org.uk/advice/search/#Problems>, as do Garden Organic, although you need to be a member to access these - <http://gardenorganic.org.uk/factsheets/index.php>

eases

To read more of Carrie's gardening exploits, visit www.homeonthehill.wordpress.com

Potato blight



I know, I know: the old fellas down the allotment swear you must burn this. But that's not right. Okay, I wouldn't leave the diseased haulms (foliage) lying around – but burying them in your compost bin is perfectly fine. The spores are blown in every season on the warm winds from Europe, and they grow and thrive in warm wet conditions.

You burning a few will make no difference to the majority of spores swirling invisibly around our vegetable plots. And they can't survive in the compost for long so when you use the compost all the spores are dead. Once you've got rid of the haulms, leave the tubers in the ground for at least 3 weeks – this means the spores on the soil surface will die off so you can then lift the tubers without risking them getting infected. However, if you do have any diseased tubers, don't put them into your own compost bin, as the spores can survive in these from year to year. They can go into green waste collections as the extra heat generated in the commercial composting process will kill off the disease.

Pear rust



Pear rust is a fungal disease that lives in the air. It also needs juniper trees to complete its lifecycle – you may find in some old books a recommendation not to grow both plants in order to avoid this disease. What it doesn't tell you is that the separation needs to be over a kilometre, so unless you have your own estate in which to grow perfect pears, this advice is pretty useless. But unless it's a spectacularly bad year for it, it doesn't do too much harm. It looks pretty bad and does limit the tree's photosynthesis ability a little, but not usually enough to seriously reduce the harvest. And again, composting it is fine, so no need for a bonfire.

Hotbin review

Master Composter Tony Curtis has just spent the last year trialling a Hotbin – a (relatively) new product that can take all sorts of food and garden waste.

Here's his report on the year:

I collected the Hotbin in January last year from (fellow Master Composter) Margaret Guttridge. It was cold and it was Easter before the temperatures got out of single figures. I started as recommended with the hot water bottle; I then added some chicken manure, cardboard and kitchen scraps – there was not much else around at that time of year. I just about kept it ticking over till the weather improved but found that whilst I could keep the top at 40°C – 60°C, the bottom was at about 3°C and far too wet. Still, I had my trusty Green Johanna to empty the immature stuff from the bottom of the Hotbin into.

The Hotbin can be challenging, it keeps on demanding food to keep the process going (otherwise it would lose heat), but unless I remove immature compost from the base there is no room in the top to add fresh material. It is rather like looking after a wood burning stove or shovelling coal into a steam train. Stop feeding it and it fizzles to a halt.

This week (January) it is chugging along at 50°C at the top and the initial composting process is quite quick, making it good for dealing with any food waste! It works better with higher calorific waste such as cooked food. More heat and less volume, rather like getting more heat out of a wood stove with better quality fuel. There is no point relying on bits of cold wet garden waste.



I have enjoyed the mental challenge of keeping it going for a year. Would I buy one? No. Would I use one if it appeared under the Christmas tree? Yes. It certainly speeds up the process but, for me, it would not work without my Green Johanna as well.

So, whoever takes on a Hotbin needs to stockpile some high calorific waste and get it up to temperature as quickly as possible. It needs lots of cardboard, far more than I would use in other bins. The Hotbin website has lots of hints and you need to read them otherwise operating this bin will be like trying to drive a steam train when no one has explained what all the levers and dials are for. Do spend half an hour going through all the FAQ on the Hotbin website and with TLC and a little cunning you can make it work very well – it can certainly speed up the composting process.

Food composting poster competition

Compost Awareness Week

5th -11th May 2014

Poster Competition

As part of International Compost Awareness Week (CAW) 2014, Leicestershire Master Composters are organising a free UK-wide poster competition to promote composting and encourage individuals, schools, colleges and businesses to reduce and compost their organic waste. The subject of this year's event is food waste and the poster should promote composting as a means of reducing the amount of food waste sent to landfill across the country.

The poster can illustrate any aspect of composting relating to food waste and could show:

- Composting of kitchen waste and leftover cooked food in Bokashi Bin or Green Cone food digester
- Composting of uncooked kitchen vegetable and garden waste using a compost heap, bin or wormery
- Hot composting of uncooked and cooked food in a Hotbin, Green Johanna or Jora home composter
- Larger scale composting of food waste in a school, pub or cafe using a Jora, Scotspin, Ridan or Rocket

Entries are invited from schools and young people between the ages of 4 and 18. Closing date is 1st May 2014. The full name, address and age of each entrant must be submitted. Entries from schools should also include the name of the school and the contact details of the teacher. The best posters will be displayed on the carryoncomposting.com web site (which contains further details) and at Snibston Discovery Museum, Coalville, Leicestershire during Compost Awareness Week.

As a condition of entry, the organisers and other approved organisations are granted the right to display copies of the poster to promote composting or to at promote or report on this competition or CAW. Some of the 2013 entries may be seen at carryoncomposting.com and may be freely reproduced.

Further details are available at www.carryoncomposting.com

Entries other than those from the launch events should be emailed as Jpeg images to Carryoncomposting@ntlworld.com