

Composting Chronicle

Issue 22 - Summer 2012

Welcome to the summer Composting Chronicle.

With summer now here, gardens and allotments in Leicestershire will be a hive of activity with people making the most of any outdoor space. Compost bins will be in great demand as many gardens are in full bloom and grass cuttings are plentiful.

Don't forget that if you have any composting questions, help is always at hand from your Master Composter. Send your questions and queries to wasteprevention@leics.gov.uk or call on 0116 305 7005.

Gardening in the summer is mostly about maintaining what you've already started. As temperatures rise and rain becomes less frequent, compost is a great additive to the soil to maintain plant life. The hot summer sun can give your compost the extra boost of heat it needs, but remember to keep your compost a little moist during the dry times, or your compost pile will start to slow down.

Another bonus of summer is the amount of grass clippings you can collect. When mowing your lawn, grass clippings can be put into your compost bin, but make sure you add to them with an equal quantity of paper or cardboard to give the correct composting mix. If you end up with too many grass clippings you can leave them on the lawn and they will break down and help fertilize your grass - but never let them go to landfill. If you have any pets such as cats or dogs the hot summer weather will make them moult more hair, which is perfect to add to your compost bin.





Worm Workshop

Article written by A.A Jackson, Master Composter

One of the more unusual activities offered to Leicestershire Master Composters and Waste Action Volunteers by Leicestershire County Council and Garden Organic was a worm workshop, held at the Eco House in Leicester during April 2012. About a dozen enthusiasts turned up and were met by experts from the Open University (OU) and the Natural History Museum (NHM).

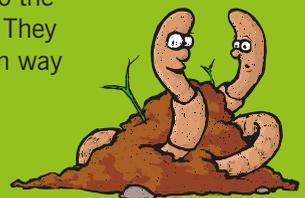
Earthworms are essential for the maintenance of a healthy soil. Only one earthworm family (Lumbricina) is found in the UK, and there are 26 separate species. About half of these are common; the others are rare and/or difficult to identify.

Jon Rosewell from the OU outlined the OPAL scheme (Open Air Laboratories: see www.OPALexplore.nature.org) which aims to get people out and about to explore their environment. He guided us through the iSpot website (www.iSpot.org.uk) where participants can log in to record observations on worms. David Jones (NHM) outlined the biology of the earthworm, its role and benefit to us and to agriculture. Working together they hope to establish a database of earthworm distribution in the UK.

Armed with spades and suitable collecting kit, our group went worm rustling in the garden of Eco House to see how many we could collect and identify. Juvenile worms are difficult to identify so we concentrated on the mature ones. Between a key from the OPAL website, a guide called Field Studies Council: Earthworms written by R W Sims and B M Gerard and help from David and Jon we made 12 or 13 correct identifications.

After the training I attempted to identify worms in my own garden. In the designated 20x20x10 cm area of my veg patch I found 14, two of these were adults and identified as Brandling and a Lob worm.

If you wish to take part in the earthworm survey and record your results, visit the OPAL and iSpot websites. Do read through all the instructions before you start collecting worms and you will need to record some details of the site and soil properties. After identification, return the worms to the surface of the soil. They will make their own way back underground.





Introduce a friend

Rot-a-Lot



Home composting is key for Leicestershire in tackling the amount of green garden waste being sent to the county's landfill sites, so engaging with more residents about compost is really important.

To encourage all existing Rot-a-Lot members to spread the word about the benefits of composting we are running a competition throughout the summer to recruit new members.

All you need to do is find a new Rot-a-Lot member and you will be entered

in to a prize draw to win a family pass to Snibston Discovery Museum. They could be a friend, colleague or relative, but they must live in Leicestershire. Simply fill in the form below and include your information and details of the new member.

The winner will be drawn from all entrants received before the closing date of Friday 14th September 2012.

Please send all entries to Composting Chronicle Team, Room 400, County Hall, Glenfield, Leicestershire LE3 8TD.



Details of Existing Rot-a-Lot member:

Name:

Address:

Details of new Rot-a-Lot member:

Name:

Address:

.....Postcode:

Telephone number:

E-mail address:

I would prefer to receive a newsletter by post

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The New Zealand Box composter

Article written by David Cannon, Master Composter

The best home composter I ever had was a New Zealand box type I made for nothing from scrap wood and old nails one Sunday afternoon in the 1980s. This was before Sunday trading when you couldn't buy anything much on a Sunday and I probably hadn't got any money anyway.

I wanted to do something for the planet on Earth Day (Earth Day is still going strong and this year was on 22nd April). This was the best idea I could come up with and it was truly amazing. From that day onwards, our household has never disposed of any fruit or vegetable kitchen waste in a refuse bin. Not to mention a whole load of other compostables such as eggshells, toilet and kitchen roll cores, vacuum cleaner dust, shredded paper and garden waste etc. It must amount to tonnes by now.

New Zealand boxes are called that because of the vision of Auckland dentist Dr Guy Chapman who observed an increase in tooth decay amongst his customers in the 1920s which he attributed to poor nutrition. He founded the Auckland Humic Compost Club (now the NZ Soil & Health Assoc.) in 1941 and promoted organic gardening by means of public demonstrations featuring the New Zealand Box composter. The composter typically consists of two (can be three or more) roughly 1 metre, usually wooden cubes placed side-by-side with open tops and fronts and slatted bases lifted off the soil for ventilation. Sectional fronts are then added by sliding planks between vertical battens and a bit of carpet over the top will keep off excess rain and keep the compost warm. The great thing about having two adjacent open fronted boxes is that you can turn the compost easily with a garden fork.

A web search of "New Zealand box composter" will bring up loads of wonderful designs. The main thing is to make good use of what you have got. Having done a lot of successful experiments with commercial and DIY plastic composters, I feel it's about time for me to return to the New Zealand box.



Master Composter

on the radio

Master Composter Sue Blockley spent an afternoon in the garden with radio presenter Ben Jackson from BBC Radio Leicester to talk him through the art of composting.

The interview started with Sue explaining how she became a Master Composter through an advert she saw in the Leicester Mercury and how she spreads the word about composting in her local community.

The focus then turned to Ben's garden and in particular his compost bin. Sue was pleasantly surprised by the quality of his compost, giving him 10 out of 10 for his efforts!

During the interview Sue gave Ben a full composting masterclass, including:

- how important it is to get the right mix of green and brown ingredients
- what can be composted from Ben's garden such as leaves and dead flowers, but not roots

- placing the compost bin on bare soil in a reasonably sunny spot will help get the best results
- how to make the most of finished compost by adding it to raised beds or a vegetable patch
- how composting helps reduce the amount of waste sent to landfill by diverting food waste from refuse bins
- what subsidised compost bins are on offer from the County Council to make it easier for Leicestershire residents to compost at home

They also spoke about the difference between a compost bin and a food waste digester. Sue recommended Ben invest in a Green Johanna so he could reuse more of his food waste, which isn't suitable to go in his composter. Ben was really eager to continue with his composting and asked if Sue or another Master Composter could return in the future.

