

# Composting

## CHRONICLE

### Autumn/Winter 2018

Welcome to the autumn edition of the Composting Chronicle. With autumn in full swing and the leaves falling from the trees, now is the perfect time to be tidying your garden before winter sets in and make the most of your compost bin.

In this issue, we explore the many benefits and uses of fallen leaves, as well as sharing how a SHIRE Recycling grant is making a difference to a community allotment in Melton Mowbray.

You can also discover how to try your hand at the traditional rural art of hedgelaying, and see what happened when the team tried their hand at creating some unusual Halloween lanterns.

As always, we'd like to thank everyone that contributed to this edition. If you have any questions, comments or suggestions for the next issue, we'd love to hear from you! Get in touch at [wasteprevention@leics.gov.uk](mailto:wasteprevention@leics.gov.uk)

We hope you enjoy each edition, but if you would like to unsubscribe, please send an email to [wasteprevention@leics.gov.uk](mailto:wasteprevention@leics.gov.uk) so we can remove you from our mailing list.

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# Have a go at hedgelaying

Do you fancy an exciting challenge of helping to maintain a green corridor for wildlife whilst enjoying being active outdoors in a beautiful part of the Leicestershire countryside?



If you do, then this is the right course for you! Learn how to lay, stake and bind a section of hedge in the traditional midlands style and try out the traditional tools used as part of the process.

The cost of the course is £70 or £60 if you live in the districts of Blaby, Charnwood or Hinckley and Bosworth. A discount for anyone on Job Seeker's Allowance is available on request.

Booking is essential, please contact [EnvironmentTeam@leics.gov.uk](mailto:EnvironmentTeam@leics.gov.uk) or phone 0116 305 7264 for further details.

## What is hedgelaying?

Hedgelaying is a traditional form of countryside hedge maintenance, used to create thick boundaries which are useful for keeping livestock in fields.

Hedges also provide wonderful habitats for wildlife, providing corridors for small animals and insects to travel along to find essential food and shelter.

Hedgelaying is an important rural skill that is being lost, with the tradition not being passed on.

It is a skill that is useful not only for the open countryside but in gardens and smallholdings, as a laid hedge can create a strong boundary feature.



# First volunteer social event hailed a success

August saw our first volunteer social event take place at the Green Place in Sileby. The venue was perfectly suited as it aims to promote all things green, much like all our volunteer schemes!

The event, which took place in the venue's yurt, gave many of our volunteers an opportunity to socialise and catch up with one other.

The highlight of the evening was guest speaker Sally Cunningham; a writer, horticultural consultant, organic gardener and lecturer with specialist interests in wildlife, beneficial insects and exotic vegetables.

Her topics for the evening included an interesting presentation on edible flowers as well as an informative session on garden insects. Many were inspired to try out some of the flower recipes at home, which included ideas for using rose petals and courgette flowers.

The whole evening was thoroughly enjoyed and plans are now in place to run regular volunteer social events.



Volunteering is a great way to get involved in a subject you're passionate about, to meet new people and to give something back to the local community.

To find out more about becoming a volunteer for the Waste and Environment team, and the different roles available, contact: [wasteprevention@leics.gov.uk](mailto:wasteprevention@leics.gov.uk)

# Smashing ways to squash pumpkin waste

Many of the large pumpkins we see in the shops in the lead up to Halloween are grown especially for carving and turning into lanterns. While they're great fun to make and display, a lot of the flesh doesn't get eaten, with up to 15 million pumpkins thrown away each year in the UK alone. That's an additional 18,000 tonnes of waste destined for landfill each autumn - the same weight as 1,500 double decker buses!

Here, Environment and Waste Technician Sallie Butt tells us about her quest to find some fun – and tasty! – alternatives to the traditional Halloween pumpkin:

I've often preferred to use a smaller, tastier variety of winter squash and cooking up the contents is part of the enjoyment. This year, I was really keen to do something different and try carving an alternative to the usual pumpkin. I roped in a few colleagues, and here are the results!

We started with fruit, because the key benefit when you're busy is that the flesh doesn't need cooking and you can eat it as it is.

My first attempt was a watermelon. I love watermelon and found myself eating the contents as I was scooping. I couldn't eat it all in one sitting and juiced up the rest for later. The watermelon was a decent size but definitely easier to carve than a pumpkin.

Next, I tried a honeydew melon. It was more of a rugby ball shape – trickier to find a design that worked with the shape, but I settled on a bat! Again, it was easy to carve with the flesh being soft and I ate it all the following day.

My colleagues tried a grapefruit and an orange, which were both quicker still. The contents were juicy but not difficult to remove, although it did leave a rather stringy pith to tidy up before carving. Once the contents were removed the outer shell was rather fragile to carve but no disasters and all looking good!

Finally, I finished with a pepper which took no time at all. I had chosen a pepper that would stand up on its own - not all of them do! I cut off the top and removed the seeds and pith and the skin was firm and easy to carve, then transformed into a stuffed pepper for eating later in the evening.

So, what's the verdict? Well, if you enjoy making a lantern and have not yet deviated from a traditional pumpkin, we can wholeheartedly recommend it. We've had great fun experimenting and produced no additional waste. There are so many options out there and personally I am keen to continue with the alternatives next year. Why not give it a go too?

If you're not sure what pumpkin delights can be rustled up in the kitchen, search 'pumpkin' on [www.lesswaste.org.uk/recipes](http://www.lesswaste.org.uk/recipes) for a host of recipes and inspiration.

After Halloween (or if you can't use your pumpkin flesh), don't forget to compost your lantern - but do remember to take out the light first!



# Melton allotment turning muck into magic



When Melton Community Allotment found out that they'd been awarded a SHIRE Recycling Grant, they knew the money would make a massive difference. Kym Barratt tells us more.

"Melton Community Allotment is a little piece of paradise in a busy world. We are hidden in the lovely Melton Country Park surrounded by wildlife.

We offer a space where local residents can come together to learn how to grow their own food, improve their diet and enjoy outdoor exercise while making friends and learning new skills. We work with nursery children, home-educated children and groups with a range of mental and physical health issues to encourage an active, healthy lifestyle and diet.

An important part of learning to grow is to learn how to make and use compost. Good soil fertility is the backbone of healthy productive plants. Also, in our throw-away society, it is vital to reduce the amount we are all putting in our bins.

When we heard that we could get a SHIRE Recycling Grant to set up a compost demonstration area on our site, we jumped at the opportunity. We want to be able to show local people the art of turning muck into magic! We also want to use the compost demonstration area as a training resource for schools, colleges, and other groups to help promote recycling and waste reduction.

We had an extra reason for wanting such a state-of-the-art composting area. When the land was given over to our project, it was clogged deep in all manner of weeds, saplings and brambles. To clear it, every bit of top soil was scraped away with diggers, leaving a pan of heavy clay subsoil, which floods every winter and turns to concrete every summer.

We need to bring life back into the land on our site and will use every scrap of organic matter to do so. The SHIRE Recycling Grant has gone a long way to helping us do that."



Leicestershire County Council offers SHIRE recycling grants of up to £3,000 for organisations and community projects to deliver waste prevention, recycling or composting activities. Activities could include:

- Food waste cafés
- Clothes swaps
- Second-hand toy libraries
- Community composting
- Upcycling events

To find out more, visit  
[www.leicestershire.gov.uk/  
community-grants](http://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/community-grants)

# Autumn gold in your back garden



Garden Organic's Judith Conroy explores the many benefits and uses of fallen leaves.

Imagine the beautiful aroma that is stirred when you disturb a woodland floor. That's leaf mould, and it really is as good as it smells. When deciduous leaves rot down they form a dark, crumbly substance with a delicate earthy scent. Though nutrient levels are quite modest, it is an excellent soil improver, bursting with valuable microscopic life and once you discover the benefits and uses of leaf mould, you'll find you can never make enough of the wonderful stuff.

## Gathering

From the very beginning, making leaf mould is a satisfying process. Raking fallen leaves keeps you warm, despite any autumnal chill, exercising your middle prior to festive over-indulgence. The prospect of the dark, wholesome result is a great incentive to clear fallen leaves from paths and any plants they may be smothering. Remember to let some leaves rot down in-situ; on bare ground they will be taken down into the soil by earthworms and under hedges they provide valuable habitat for hibernating creatures.

## Making a Leaf Mould Pile

Aim to make a pile that is at least 1 metre square; air needs to get in, but you don't want the leaves to blow away, so a wire bay is ideal. The same pile can be added to for several weeks as the leaves will slump under their own weight. (If you have room, make more piles. If space is tight, you can make leaf mould on a smaller scale by sealing leaves in large, perforated plastic bags.) Once the heap is made, the only other thing you may need to do is water it in very dry weather.

Leaves take between one and three years to become leaf mould depending of the size of heap, moisture levels and tree species. The main decomposers of leaves are fungi rather than bacteria, making it a slower process and it won't get as warm as a compost heap. Whilst this gradual breakdown is happening, the leaf mould pile is a superb place for beneficial creatures to live; garden allies such as earthworms and slug devouring ground-beetles will soon move in.



## Using Leaf Mould

**Mulch** - After just one year, leaf mould is usually quite coarse but still makes a great mulch. Spread around herbaceous perennials it will suppress weeds and will continue to break down and be drawn into the ground by worms and other creatures, improving the soil structure. Unlike garden compost, the low nutrient content means that you don't need to worry about the goodness leaching away so it can be used to protect the soil over winter if you have left it too late to sow a green manure.

**Soil Improver** - Most soils will benefit from a dose of leaf mould. It boosts the content of organic matter and though low in nutrients, is teeming with microorganisms that encourage biological activity in the soil, improving its structure. Root crops like carrots and beetroot don't need a high-nutrient dose of garden compost, but you can still improve the soil with a dressing of leaf mould. Lightly fork it into the top layer of soil, or spread over the surface once young plants are established. It shouldn't be necessary to dig the ground unless it is very compacted, as the leaf mould will be incorporated via natural processes.

**Great for Clay Soils** - Leaf mould is ideal for breaking up heavy clay. Unlike garden compost it can be applied liberally without over-feeding the soil. It improves the structure by helping the sticky particles bind into lighter crumbs as well as boosting natural processes that will also work to this end. Clay soils may also suffer from 'capping' over winter. This is when heavy rain beats the soil surface to form a solid crust, preventing further rain soaking into the ground and can contribute to local flooding. A 5cm covering of leaf mould applied in autumn diffuses the force of raindrops and helps prevent capping.

**Compost Mixes** - Leaf mould is the ultimate renewable, local ingredient to edge you closer to self-sufficiency in potting media. Mixed in varying quantities with richer garden compost you can make your own blends to suit a variety of container grown plants.

2 to 3 year old leaf mould that is well rotted can be sieved and used neat as seed compost; there are very few weed seeds and the low nutrient content is ideal. Passed through a small gauged sieve, it can be refined to a fine crumb, suitable for even the tiniest foxglove seeds.





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