



# Composting Chronicle

Issue 23 - Autumn 2012

## Welcome to the Autumn Composting Chronicle.



With the abundance of composting ingredients available towards the end of summer and throughout autumn, now is the perfect time to get composting.

Spent bedding plants, autumn leaves, grass cuttings and prunings can all be used. If you get it right, this autumn's compost will provide a free supply of nutritious soil conditioner that will enrich your spring planting, producing an abundance of flowers, fruit and vegetables next year.

Here are a few tips to help your compost bin this autumn:

- Using a 50/50 mix of 'greens' (vegetable peelings, fruit scraps, old flowers, grass cuttings) and 'browns' (woody garden prunings, egg boxes, scrunched up paper) makes great compost
- Mowing leaves before you add them to the compost bins will help them to break down more easily
- Turn your compost regularly; aerating the mixture will help to speed up the process

Hard work during autumn will pay off next spring when your free homemade compost helps your vegetables and plants thrive.

A variety of sizes of compost bins and composting accessories are available at special offer prices exclusive to County and Leicester City residents. Visit [www.getcomposting.com](http://www.getcomposting.com) or call **0844 571 4444** to find out more or to place an order.



We would also like to thank those members who opted to receive future editions of the Chronicle by email and encourage others to do this by emailing [recycle@leics.gov.uk](mailto:recycle@leics.gov.uk).

# Is too much citrus peel in compost a bad thing?

Being a Rot-a-Lot member not only entitles you to a copy of the latest Composting Chronicle, it also means you can find out answers to any composting questions you have. All you need to do is send them in to us at [wasteprevention@leics.gov.uk](mailto:wasteprevention@leics.gov.uk) and Leicestershire Master Composters will do their best to give you an answer.

Rot-a-Lot member Mike Howkins did just that with his query about citrus fruits discouraging worms in compost bins. Here's what our Master Composters said:

## Question

I am told that too much orange and grapefruit peel discourages the worms in one's compost.

**Mike Howkins:**  
Leicestershire resident

## Answers

We eat lots of citrus fruit and all the peel goes in our Green Johanna. We have loads of worms. Best not to introduce too much into a wormery, however, as this would be unfair to the worms

**Master Composter Steve Salmen**

Concerning orange and grapefruit peel, small quantities are not a problem; however large quantities can make the compost acid and should be avoided

**Master Composter Jane Woolmer**

I prefer to dispose of all citrus and all onion in my green cone. Invertebrates (especially worms), tend to avoid it so it slows the composting process down. If you haven't got an alternative to the main composter, you can still put some in and it will decompose but slowly and very large quantities will give the worms a problem.

**Master Composter David Cannon**

I do not believe that in a conventional compost bin that the percentage of citrus in the heap would ever pose a problem for the worm population.

As long as the heap is being fed a balanced diet of garden waste and other kitchen scraps such as cabbage leaves, carrot peelings, eggshells etc. which will tend to be more alkaline then I do not see a problem.

However in a wormery, which is a much smaller space, an excess of citrus could disturb the balance so it is generally considered safer not to add any citrus at all to a wormery.

**Master Composter Tony Curtis**

Citrus skins have a Carbon:Nitrogen ratio in the middle range between 25-50 in the same category as brassicas and other fibrous green stems. I always tell people during my talks on wormeries that worms are fussy eaters and do not like citrus or onions (I include garlic in this just to be on the safe side). However I do put these in my conventional compost bins on the basis that they will be sufficiently diluted by the other waste not to cause a problem.

George Pilkington in *Composting with Worms* (eco-logic books) composts onions before putting them

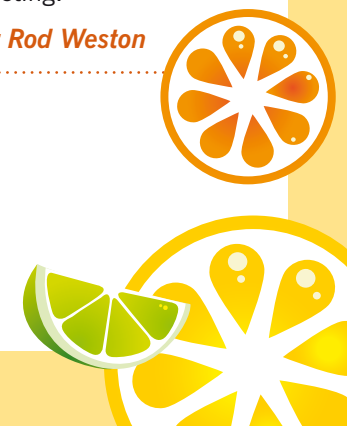
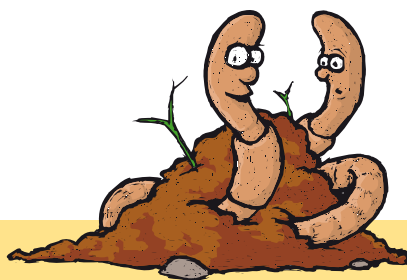
in the wormery and recommends that fresh onions or their skins do not make up more than 10% of the total material.

In the case of citrus skins the problem is an oil: d-limonene which irritates the skin of worms and can be fatal in quantity. However in a compost bin the worms will ignore it until the microbes have broken it down.

My favourite compost guru Nicky Scott, author of many books (including *How to Make and Use Compost*) writes that he is always being told that orange peel does not compost but that he has been using it for years. He actually recommends oranges as a way of attracting slugs

My advice is not to put citrus in a wormery but that composting orange or lemons does not cause a problem to the worms in a conventional compost bin or heap. If you are concerned you could use a Bokashi bin prior to composting.

**Master Composter Rod Weston**



# Why give your compost heap a turn?

Turning your heap (or the contents of your compost bin) may mean all the difference between getting compost within 6-8 months or over a year as it aerates (adds air to) the contents. Every heap benefits from getting oxygen into the mixture. If not, your compost heap may just sit there with the bacteria feeling rather sluggish.

Here are some good reasons you should turn your compost heap:

## 1. Turning re-heats the heap by keeping it in an aerobic state

Adding air is important in helping the materials break down into compost as the mixture of brown and green ingredients needs oxygen as part of the decomposition process.

## 2. Turning creates new passageways for air and moisture as the heap compresses

As material decomposes your heap will compress and shrink in size. This will naturally cool down the heap before the material is fully decomposed. Turning exposes more material and fluffs it all up, thereby allowing the mix of air, moisture and heat to continue the decomposition process.

## 3. Turning speeds up the composting process

A cold heap breaks down very slowly. Each time you turn your heap you create more surface area of the rotting material so that it will reheat itself repeatedly after each turning.

## 4. Turning eliminates odours and matting of material

A heap that stinks probably has too much nitrogen-rich (green) material and/or is too moist. Turning an odorous or matted compost heap exposes more surface area so that air and heat can move through the heap again.

There are no set rules for how often you should turn your heap – it depends on a lot of factors including the size of the heap, how much (and what sort of) new material you add and the time of year – but it's a good idea to check every few weeks. If the heap has cooled down, give it a turn!

# Composting Talks at Snibston

Rot-a-Lot club members are invited to two free composting master classes run by Leicestershire Master Composters at Snibston Discovery Museum on **Saturday 17th November 2012**. The talks will be a chance for Rot-a-Lot members both new and old to get to grips with composting, or brush up on the basics. The sessions will cover two main areas:

## Composting and Compost and Comfrey teas 10.30am-12noon

An introduction to home composting of garden and kitchen waste including cooked food. Outline of traditional methods (trench, sheet and lasagne) hot heaps, cold composting using bins and domestic food digesters. Types of bins available, the composting process and the mix of "greens" and "browns". Making compost and comfrey tea liquid plant foods.

## Worm composting 1pm-2.30pm

Introduction to composting with worms. Types of wormeries available: single tray (dump and sort), stacking and homemade, choice of worms, worm wee liquid feed.

The sessions finish with a guided tour of the Compost Demonstration Site to look at the range of different composting techniques available. There will be a chance to ask questions and share ideas.

Pre-booking is essential, so to reserve your place please call 0116 305 7005 or e-mail [wasteprevention@leics.gov.uk](mailto:wasteprevention@leics.gov.uk).

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