



Composting

CHRONICLE

Spring/Summer 2016

Hello and welcome to the latest Composting Chronicle - a little bit later than usual to coincide with Compost Awareness Week this year's Compost Awareness Week, 1 – 7 May.

Inside, we've got:

- Compost Awareness Week events and competition
- Hints and tips for your composting over the spring and summer months
- Some of the science behind getting the perfect mix for your compost
- Two new groups of volunteer Master Composters, ready to go and spread the word about home composting
- Composting in warmer climes
- Ideas for what to do with old electrical equipment you no longer use

As always, we'd like to thank everyone who contributed material for this edition. If you've got any queries, comments or suggestions please send them in to wasteprevention@leics.gov.uk



Compost Awareness Week events

Family fun composting session

Date and time: **Thursday 5 May, 9.30-11am**

Venue: **Barwell Community House, 43
Bradgate Road, Barwell, LE9 8FB**

Cost: **Free**

No booking required, just turn up

Staring Master Composters...Karen and Joolz

We are hoping to have a wormery up and running, plus lots of fun and games aimed at getting families interested in composting and to run a gardening/composting group off the back of it!

For further information, please call
01455 844884

Home composting made easy workshop

Date and time: **Thursday 5 May, 2 - 3pm**

Venue: **Hermitage FM Coffee Lounge,
Memorial Square, Coalville, Leics, LE67 3TU**

Cost: **Free**

No booking required, just turn up.

Come and join us for a short workshop and learn everything you need to get composting!

This workshop is aimed at anyone who is keen to reduce their food waste but doesn't know where to start with composting, and those who have already made a start but are keen to improve.

For further details,
email carryoncomposting@ntlworld.com
or visit www.carryoncomposting.com



Compost bins, wormeries and traditional composting techniques

Date and time: **Saturday 7 May, 2- 4pm**

Venue: **Botanic Garden, Glebe Rd, Leicester LE2 2NE**

Cost: **Free**

No booking required, just turn up.

Master Composters will offer a guided tour of the demonstration site, which includes approximately 30 different compost bins and wormeries. You will also learn about traditional techniques and homemade liquid feeds, including compost and comfrey teas and worm wee.

For further details, email carryoncomposting@ntlworld.com
or visit www.carryoncomposting.com

Compost Awareness Week competition

Once again, Master Composters are running competitions to mark this year's Compost Awareness Week (1 – 7 May).

Rot, Pot, Sow and Grow Project

If you make your own seed and potting compost, this is your chance to show how good it is.

During Compost Awareness Week 2016, we are challenging schools, allotment societies and other community groups as well as individual composters to make their own peat-free seed and potting compost and use it to grow a vegetable or flower.

A second pot containing commercially available seed, potting or multipurpose compost should also be sown or planted at the same time to provide a “control” and allow photos to be taken to provide a means of comparison between entries.

Photos should be taken at weekly intervals once from the time of germination until the plant flowers or crops.

For more information and to register an interest, please email carryoncomposting@ntlworld.com



Hints and tips for composting over the spring and summer months

Grass

One of the most common problems for composters every year is what to do with all the grass clippings. Large quantities added at once will unbalance the mix (see Kate Newman's article) and you can end up with a slimy, smelly mess. One of the best things to do is to mix your grass with scrunched-up paper or corrugated cardboard torn into small pieces to maintain air spaces and add carbon to the mix. Another thing you can do is to spread the clippings on the soil around plants to use as a mulch to suppress weeds and help retain moisture.

Woody prunings

At this time of the year, you may struggle to have enough woody material for your heap as these will have all come in the autumn and winter. Ideally, you'll have a supply of these set aside from then and these are really good to add in small batches over the warmer months to keep your heap structured and healthy.

Weeds

Like the grass, these will come thick and fast; some can go straight into the bin, some require caution. Before they flower, annual weeds like groundsel, chickweed and bitter cress can go in, as there is no risk of having their seed in the compost.

Don't put in perennial weeds like ground elder, couch grass, nettles, dandelions and docks as they are liable to grow in the heap and will reappear when you use the compost

next year. Their roots can be composted if you drown them first. Place them in a bucket, weigh them down with a stone or slab and cover with water. Place a lid on the bucket and leave for several weeks. You can then drain off the liquid and pour it on to your compost heap, along with the drowned roots. Alternatively, put them in your green waste bin or take them to your Recycling and Household Waste Site – these will go to large-scale composting that will get hot enough to kill off the weeds.

Keep it moist

The warmer weather is a pleasant change but make sure your heap doesn't dry out. Keep your compost moist like a well-rung sponge to keep all the microorganisms alive and well. Always remember to wear gloves when handling compost and wash your hands well afterwards.

The end of summer

Come September, the leaves will start falling and you can begin collecting them to add to your compost and leaf mould bins. Start early so the leaves are only collected in manageable piles and, if you've got a lawnmower, mowing them is a great way to speed up the process.



Some of the science behind getting the perfect mix for your compost

Browns and greens: compost chemistry

To make things simple when encouraging new composters we talk about 'greens' and 'browns', but what does that really mean and why is it important to successful composting?

In general, 'browns' provide carbon, whilst 'greens' provide nitrogen. These are the two most important elements needed for decomposition by microorganisms. Carbon is an energy source for bacteria as well as making up about half the mass of their cells. Nitrogen is used to make enzymes, proteins and DNA – all of which are vital for growth of bacteria, as well as making up the remaining half of their cells.

The ideal carbon to nitrogen ratio for adding to your compost heap is around 25:1 and this is usually achieved with equal parts greens and browns, hence the simplified instructions! Too much nitrogen results in

ammonia being released and the nitrogen is lost to the air (and it smells!). Too much carbon leads to very slow composting as the growth of bacteria is limited by the lack of nitrogen.

In finished compost the carbon to nitrogen ratio drops to around 10:1 as carbon is lost to the air as carbon dioxide (CO_2) whilst nitrogen is recycled and reused by microorganisms.

Importantly, the whole process results in complex materials being broken down into simple forms such as ammonia (NH_3), sulphate (SO_4^{2-}) and nitrate (NO_3^-) These are readily available for plants to use – which is why your plants appreciate your compost so much!

Kate Newman

**Master Composter Project
Co-ordinator, Garden Organic**

Two new groups of volunteer Master Composters, ready to go and spread the word about home composting

Since the last issue of the Composting Chronicle, two new groups of Master Composters were trained up over a weekend course at Ryton Gardens.

The first group were trained in October and were joined by two colleagues from the Isle of Bute who have since helped set up a new Master Composter scheme there.



The second group were trained in March (whilst this edition was being written) with colleagues from Coventry and Solihull.

Keep an eye out for Master Composters at an event near you over the spring and summer months.

If you'd like to book one of our expert volunteers for an event, a talk or if you need some advice, please e-mail wasteprevention@leics.gov.uk and we'll put you in touch.



Composting in warmer climes

As part of an occasional series highlighting composting around the world, Master Composter Bryan Woodward sent this photo taken on a recent trip to St Lucia.

Do you have any photos of compost heaps from your travels?

Send them in to wasteprevention@leics.gov.uk and we'll publish the best ones in future Composting Chronicles.

Don't bin it, bring it!

Do you have any old electrical or electronic items at home that you're not using any more? Did you know that anything that ran off batteries or a plug can go for reuse or recycling?

If it's something that still works but you just don't want it any more, please send it for reuse. You can do this in one of many ways:

- Give it to a friend or family member
- Give it to a charity shop that can accept electrical items
- Post it on a website such as Freecycle or Freegle
- Sell it on a website such as eBay or Gumtree
- If you live near Mountsorrel, Coalville, or Lutterworth you can take certain electrical items to dedicated reuse drop-off points at your local Recycling and Household Waste Site

If it's not working, it could just need a simple repair. Some charity and reuse organisations can repair electrical goods. Alternatively,

- Websites www.espartes.co.uk and www.ifixit.com offer free information for repairing a range of electrical items
- See if there's a repair café near you where it can be fixed or you can even learn how to fix it yourself!

If it's beyond repair, then it can still go for recycling. Some areas have collections for small electrical items and every Recycling and Household Waste Site will have a collection point. Go to www.leicestershire.gov.uk/find-a-recycling-and-household-waste-site to find out where your nearest site is.

To check whether something can be recycled, ask yourself the following questions. As soon as you've answered "yes" to one of them, then it can be recycled.

- Does it have a plug? ✓
- Does it use batteries? ✓
- Does it need charging? ✓
- Does it have a picture of a crossed out wheelie bin on it? ✓

Finally, make sure you don't forget to erase any personal data from devices like phones, tablets & laptops

For more information, go to: www.recyclenow.com/what-to-do-with/electrical-items

