



Composting

CHRONICLE

Spring/Summer 2015

Hello & welcome to the latest edition of the Composting Chronicle. As we're putting this together, spring is doing its best to arrive and, once again, the gardens and compost heaps have already started waking up.

You'll probably remember that in the last edition we asked you to tell us what you thought about the Chronicle and inside you'll find the results of that survey. One of the things that you told us was that you were interested in seeing articles on other waste reduction topics so we've started with an article on the Love Food Hate Waste campaign. You probably compost a lot, if not all, of your kitchen & food waste already and we've got some tips to help you cut down on some of that waste.

We've also got an article on some of the more unusual things that can go into your heap or bin and there's what will probably be the last report from one of our Master Composters on life with a Hotbin food digester.

Finally, we've got a sneak preview at a Compost Demonstration Site that's planned to open in time for Compost Awareness Week in May.

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



Strange things to Compost

By Carrie Pailthorpe, Public Health Analyst, Leicestershire County Council
(Formerly Senior Horticultural Advisor, Garden Organic)

As an advisor at Garden Organic I was often asked what could and could not be composted. We had a game based on just this topic for our 'Muck and Magic' courses – and it was always interesting to hear what folk were afraid to compost.

Rhubarb leaves are one of the more common things people ask about – yes, you can compost them. Sure, they're poisonous to eat, but that'll break down in the composting process and not cause any issues (just don't eat handfuls of the actual compost!). In fact, some allotmenters grow rhubarb specifically as a biomass plant for composting, and don't eat it at all!

But I wanted to talk about some of the more unusual things I've successfully composted myself or heard of other people doing. In theory you can compost anything that was once living – animal or vegetable. So that includes things like paper and cardboard, as well as vegetable matter and meat. The reason why it is not advisable to add meat to a domestic composting system is that it can attract rats, as can all cooked food. These can be composted in specialised food waste digesters or large-scale in-vessel composting operations as they are sealed but they are often expensive or require far larger quantities of organic matter to be able to generate the required temperatures.

You can compost plenty of other waste such as hair clippings and beard trimmings. And what about toe and finger nail clippings? Not pretty I know, but I add mine to the compost – every little helps. And why stop at human bits we regularly cut off? Add the proceeds of the dog and cat grooming too. If you've used cotton wool without harsh chemicals, that can go in too. In fact, and cotton or natural fibres can be added in moderation. I've just noticed that my bathroom rug has worn through – it's just cotton with no



artificial backing so that will be added to the heap as soon as I source a replacement. But you can also add your worn out knickers and boxer shorts. You may end up picking the elastic bits out of the finished compost, but the rest will be nourishing your garden. Once you think about it there are lots of textiles that can be added – old woolly jumpers, linen tea towels, stained and torn kids' t-shirts, cotton or wool socks, cotton shopping bags – anything that is a natural fibre and too knackered for the charity shop. We could take this further and think about leather shoes and handbags – I'm sure it's possible but I think it would take a long time for something that tough to break down. However, rubber washing-up gloves definitely compost - I add a pair every 2-3 months or so. I have tried composting a hot-water bottle, but fished it out and threw it away after 2 years in the heap with only moderate degradation! And on the topic of rubber – all those annoying red rubber bands the post office put round the mail, and popped balloons from the kids' parties – all food for my compost heap.

The contents of your vacuum cleaner can be composted, as can the lint from your tumble dryer after you've used it to dry cotton towels or bedding. In fact once you start to think outside the box, there's loads of things – bamboo and wooden skewers from the summer barbeques, bamboo chop sticks from the Chinese take-away, pencil shavings, the wrappings from some recycled toilet paper and kitchen roll, wine corks,

toothpicks, stale dried herbs and spices, natural bath sponges and loofahs, slivers of vegetable-based soap bars... just remember that it will take a long time for some of the things like corks & chopsticks to break down completely. You might have to pull them out of your harvested compost and put them back in at the top a few times before they disappear.

I've added the odd deceased goldfish from my garden pond to my compost heap – I know we said no meat, but I hardly think one small goldfish among the piles of garden waste is going to attract hordes of rats. Bob Flowerdew claimed on one Gardeners' Question Time to have composted an entire deer that had been killed in a road traffic accident – I think that's taking things a bit too far.



Results from the Composting Chronicle survey

You will remember that in the last edition of the Composting Chronicle we asked you for your views about the Rot-a-Lot Club and the Chronicle. Thank you for your responses – here's a digest of what you told us.

- 97% of respondents compost at home, 69% signed up for the tips & advice and 97% find that the Chronicle helps them to keep on home composting.
- 100% make use of the information & advice.
- Between 81% and 100% read the different types of article but a majority were also willing to see other subjects covered, with 59% happy to see other waste reduction ideas covered.
- Although 42% said that two editions a year was not enough, 58% thought that was about right.
- 61% did not want to pay to continue membership.

So... here's what we'll do.

We will keep publishing the Composting Chronicle, free, twice a year. We'll keep on concentrating on tips and advice to help you keep composting your garden and food waste but we'll also start adding some articles that will help you reduce your waste in other areas, starting with a few tips to help cut down food waste.



As always, we're keen to hear your views so please contact us at wasteprevention@leics.gov.uk to let us know what you think of the changes we've made.

Also, please use that address if you've got any queries about composting and waste reduction or if you've got a suggestion for an article.

Master Composter Contributions

By David Garrett

Master Composter Programme Leader, Garden Organic

Each year we are astounded by the contributions volunteer Master Composters make to the programme, 2014 was no exception. There are currently 538 volunteers and over the year a staggering 5,600 volunteer hours have been recorded. That is 5,600 hours spent promoting home composting in local communities around the UK, a feat that no local council could ever hope to achieve on its own.

County shows, village fetes, school open days, open gardens, parish magazines, online blogs, community gardens, demonstration sites ... the Master Composters have been there. It is estimated that the Master Composters have communicated with at least 20,000 people over the year (figure based on responses of number of people spoken to in online activity log).

For information about other volunteering opportunities visit www.leics.gov.uk/volunteering



Compost awareness week

4-10 May 2015

Give composting a go
with a cut price compost
bin from just **£10.98***

For more information or to order
visit: www.getcomposting.com
call: **0844 571 4444** Quoting reference LWP04A

For composting tips from Leicestershire Master Composters visit
www.facebook.com/leicestershirerecycling

*Plus £5.99 delivery per order. Open to Leicester City and County residents only.



Hotbin report 2014

I acquired the Hotbin in April 2014 and I put a small amount of material from another bin to start it off. The bin quickly filled - not being particularly large; it reasonably easily reached a temperature of 40°. During the summer the temperature rose to a maximum of 60°, but tended to be from around 50°.

All kitchen waste went into the Hotbin as well as garden waste, cardboard and vacuum dust. It took me a few months before I realized I also needed to have layers of chippings in order to provide air pockets (though cardboard had been put in). This does help to keep the temperature up if regularly added. The bin needs to have frequent additions of green waste to maintain a good temperature.

Removing the compost at the bottom I found difficult, the removable panel is large, but the compost was so compacted that it was forcing the panel open. It came out with difficulty and was a messy job. My grandchildren were delighted with the huge quantity of worms and were there to help. I have been surprised at how many worms are sitting at the top as well as in the compost. They are clearly working very hard! That is why a lot of juice comes out of the bottom. A pity it can't be saved.

I discovered it was better to remove the compost more frequently so as not to be so compacted. It was put on a pallet compost heap to mature. It had produced some excellent compost in about 3 months. Winter maturity will be slower as the temperature seems to sit around 40°.



I have always had a serious problem of rats in the garden around the compost heaps, especially in the winter when they seek warmth. The Hotbin is no different. They dug underneath and were visiting the rat restaurant – I think they liked the liquid coming out which is quite a lot as the composting process is faster. I don't think they got into the bin and no food waste was available as it was all inside the bin. The rat man suggested putting it on a load trolley so that it could be moved regularly thus disturbing the rats.

Disaster struck on 8th December when the dog (Jack Russell cross) could smell something in the compost, or more likely could smell rats or squirrels that had been there and used his paws to make 2 holes in the bin. Three days earlier I had put some stock bones and pheasant feathers in having read Alys Fowler's article on her Hotbin and how everything could go in (including stock bones). My experiment had not worked. My normal practice is to exclude stock bones from the compost.

So ended my trial of the Hotbin. It has been very convenient, and I may be persuaded to get one.

Jane Woolmer, Master Composter

Compost Demonstration Site

Over the winter, volunteers Rod Weston and Ted Boyd have been hard at work preparing a new Composting Demonstration Site at Leicester Botanic Gardens on Glebe Road in Oadby.

They're planning to have the site open for Compost Awareness Week at the beginning of May and here's a sneak preview of the site starting to take shape.



Composting in Space

Kate Newman – Project Co-ordinator, Garden Organic



As the International Space station orbits the planet hundreds of experiments are underway on board. Children at a school in California have been lucky enough to design and run one of these experiments, and they chose to investigate composting in space!

Are *Eisenia fetida* (red worms) able to compost food waste into soil in microgravity?

If worm composting is possible in microgravity in space, this would solve an important waste problem and potentially create a growing medium in space to grow plants, produce oxygen and even food for the astronauts. The schoolchildren carry out the same experiment on earth in order to compare and contrast the results on earth and in space.

It's fantastic that composting experiments are being carried out on the ISS, and we're sure it won't be long before we see the first Master Composter in space!

Love Food Hate Waste

The average household in the UK throws away just 46g of food each day. That doesn't sound a lot, but it soon adds up, with UK households wasting a mountainous 7 million tonnes of food each year. The vast majority of this food could have been eaten if it had been cared for a little better in our homes.

Wasting food is a costly habit; it's estimated that UK households spend £12.5 billion each year on buying food that is unnecessarily wasted (costing the average household £9 per week). With one in five bags of food sold at supermarkets ending up in the rubbish bin.

The vast majority of this wasted food is sent to landfill sites where it breaks down and releases the powerful greenhouse gas methane. If no food was sent to landfill it would have the carbon saving equivalent of removing one in four cars from our roads.

How can I help?

Home composting is a fantastic way of diverting some food waste from landfill sites, but ultimately the best way of dealing with food waste is to prevent it in the first place. Love Food Hate Waste is a national charity highlighting the social, financial and environmental impact of wasting food and gives simple ideas to reduce the amount of food you throw away:

- 1) Plan your meals in advance. This helps you to avoid overbuying food, and enables you to make the most of the foods that you do buy.
- 2) Use a shopping list, and stick to it. Also avoid shopping when hungry.
- 3) Get to know your dates. Use by dates show the date to which foods are safe to eat if stored correctly, and should always be adhered to. Best before dates are a guide to food quality only.



You can receive regular money saving recipe emails, like this Lamb Rogan Josh. To join send your email address to waste@leics.gov.uk

- 4) Get savvy with storage. Storing foods according to the instructions on the packaging will prolong their useable life. Many foods (probably more than you think) can be frozen, and if doing so, can be frozen up to the use by date (not just on the day of purchase).
- 5) Portion control. Measure out your portions, particularly for items like dried pasta and rice. This helps you prepare the right amount and avoids leftovers.
- 6) Get creative with leftovers; If you do cook or prepare too much food, eat it the next day. There is a wealth of tips and recipes for dealing with leftovers available on the [Love Food Hate Waste](http://LoveFoodHateWaste.com) website, and you can sign up to receive a fortnightly recipe by emailing etddemo@leics.gov.uk

Find out more about Love Food Hate Waste and how you can get involved in Leicestershire via our Facebook page www.facebook.com/LeicestershireRecycling

**LOVE
FOOD**
hate waste

“ I’ve learnt to
reduce my
food waste.
Help others
to reduce
theirs.”

Leicestershire County
Council is looking for
Waste Action Volunteers.



www.leics.gov.uk/volunteering

**Become a
Volunteer**