



## **Composting Workshop Notes**

Composting is a huge subject so the workshop was focused on the basics of hot and cold composting with a very brief overview of other ways of composting and links to find out more. The section on other ways to compost is at the end of this handout.

### **A Basic Guide to Hot and Cold Composting**

#### **The basic ingredients needed for composting**

Air

Warmth

Water

Raw ingredients

A suitable site

#### **Raw Ingredients**

There are 2 types of raw ingredients:

Greens: which are high in nitrogen and generally wet and soft.

Browns: which are high in carbon and generally drier and harder.

The easiest way to start composting is to use a 50:50 mix greens to browns.

#### **What can go in a compost bin?**

##### Greens

E.g. Cut flowers, fruits and vegetable scraps, young garden and house plants, young weeds, small amounts of grass cuttings.

##### Browns

E.g. Straw, hay, sawdust, some leaves, prunings / trimmings, older garden and house plants, the areas of plants that give them their structure e.g. stems. Also, paper/cardboard.

Scrunch paper and cardboard into balls so that they contain air.

### In-betweens

E.g. Tea bags / leaves, coffee grounds, old compost, vacuum cleaner contents.

### What should NOT go into your compost

Cooked food, dairy, bread, raw meat and fish.

Diseased plants, pernicious weeds or weed seeds.

Cat and dog waste.

### Size of the ingredients

Small pieces of ingredients are best as they increase the surface area for the organisms to start the decomposition process. Therefore, tear, cut or shred your ingredients before adding to the compost heap.

### Type of compost bin

The type of compost bin you choose depends on:

What you will use the compost for

The size of your garden

How much you have to compost

Whether you want to do cold or hot composting

Your budget

Your time

Your physical ability

There are a huge range of compost bins.

For example: Dalek" bins, square / rectangular plastic or wooden bins, tumblers and making your own bin.

To aid decomposition, the best size of compost bin is about 1 metre square or bigger.

When choosing a bin, make sure it protects your compost from the worst of the wind and rain. Also, make sure that you are able to access your compost easily to turn or aerate it and to dig it out.

### Where to position a compost bin

An accessible place all year round

On soil / grass / weed suppressing matting / carpet

In sun or partial sun

Sheltered from the worst of the wind and rain

### **Try to avoid placing a compost bin:**

On concrete, tarmac or patio slabs

Under trees

### **Cold composting is:**

More passive in the compost heap

More passive for you

You can add ingredients whenever you choose to

The compost heap needs less turning than a hot compost heap

It can take many months to get compost

It does not kill diseased plants and weed seeds

It can be superb for wildlife

### **Making a cold compost heap**

**Optional:** Place a layer of browns at the bottom a few inches deep e.g. twigs / small branches to help air to circulate at the bottom and liquid to drain away.

Add browns and greens as they become available – 50/50 mix.

To aid decomposition aerate the compost heap with a fork as and when. You don't need to completely turn the heap unless you want to.

### **When is the compost ready?**

When the compost bin is full don't add any more ingredients for up to a year.

After about a year you should have good compost in the lower part of the heap and you can dig this out and use it.

Leave the remaining part of the compost heap and mix it with fresh ingredients to start a new compost heap.

It's beneficial to have two compost heaps: One you are adding ingredients to and one that is left to decompose.

### **Hot composting is:**

More active in the compost heap and more active for you

You add all the ingredients at the same time

The ingredients must be in small pieces, ideally shredded

It only takes a few months to get compost

It can kill diseased plants and weed seeds

### **Making a hot compost heap**

Add alternate layers, a few inches thick, of smaller or shredded pieces of greens and browns.

Or, mix the small or shredded pieces of greens and browns together before adding to your compost bin.

### **Turning the hot compost heap**

Hot composting assists microorganisms such as bacteria to get to work.

The compost heap can get very hot e.g. 60 degrees C.

The compost heap will start to cool down after a week or so.

At this point, turn the compost heap again to introduce parts of the heap that have not yet started to be broken down e.g. compost edges.

When turning, check the moisture content of the compost heap.

As the compost gets broken down by the bacteria the temperature will lessen and you will not need to turn it as often. Other wildlife will then start to decompose what is left.

### **When is the compost ready?**

Hot compost can be ready in as little as 3 - 6 months.

### **Uses for compost**

Mulch

Soil conditioner

Lawn conditioner

Seed and potting mix

### **Leaf mould**

Leaves take a long time to decompose so making leaf mould is more beneficial than adding leaves to your compost heap.

Collect the leaves in Autumn and add moisture.

Optional: Shred or mow the leaves to increase the surface area for decomposition.

Put them in a container e.g. fine wire container or plastic bags with holes in them.

Leave them for 1-2 years.

Between 1-2 years: The leaf mould can be used as a mulch or soil improver.

2 years or more: The leaf mould is finer and can be used as a sowing mix or potting compost .

## **Other ways to compost**

Indoor composting e.g. Bokashi, Wormery

Outdoor composting e.g. Wormery, Green Johanna, Green Cone

For a comprehensive guide to each of these please go to:

[www.northyorks.gov.uk/composting](http://www.northyorks.gov.uk/composting). Then go to “Alternative Composting Systems”.

*(The image on first page of this handout is courtesy of Microsoft Clip Art)*