



## COMPOSTING: dos, don'ts, why and how

LEAVENHEATH • POLSTEAD • STOKE BY NAYLAND

### Why bother ??

- ◆ Up to 30% of household rubbish can be composted into a useful product instead of going to landfill sites. (Landfill sites are filling up and in the near future Councils will have to pay financial penalties for landfill use.)
- ◆ If organic matter is buried it cannot compost down because of the absence of air. Fermenting buried materials produce toxic liquids which leach into groundwater and methane which is explosive and contributes to the greenhouse effect.
- ◆ Home composting reduces transport of waste, recycles useful materials at home and produces nutritious food for the garden.

### How to get started.

You can build your own compost bin from used wood and offcuts, pallets, chicken wire etc., covering it with a lid of plastic or old carpet to reduce moisture loss and keep out excess water. Or you can buy a plastic compost bin from Suffolk County Council at a highly subsidized price. Phone 0845 077 0759 to find out sizes and prices currently available.

### Where to put your compost bin(s).

Put your compost bin in a sunny spot so that heat can help decomposition. Choose an accessible place (or you may be tempted not to use it) and if possible place it on soil or grass, where moisture can drain out and worms can get in. If you use a concrete base put a thick layer of soil or compost in the bottom of the bin. IF you are worried about rats getting into your plastic compost bin you could put a layer of wire netting underneath and coming a few inches up the sides of the bin.

### What to put in - What to leave out.

Vegetable and fruit scraps, tea bags, coffee

grounds, grass cuttings, crushed eggshells, finely chopped shrub prunings, weeds (pref. no seeds), old pot plants, straw and hay. Paper towels, paper bags, and torn up cardboard and egg boxes can all go in. But NOT coloured print, glossy paper and glue which may contain metals and toxins.

Do not put in dairy products, cooked food, meat, fish, bones, bread, fat, nappies, pernicious weeds, coal ash, cat or dog litter, large woody branches or persistent disease-infected plants.

### Starting off

- ◆ Collect enough mixed soft and tougher material for a 6 inch layer at the bottom of the bin. Mix and chop it and put it in, water it if dry. If it's a home made bin cover with an old piece of carpet to keep the heat in and keep the bin covered.
- ◆ Add other materials as available. Thick stalks need to be smashed or chopped. If it's dry add water; too wet - add more dry stuff.
- ◆ Thick layers heat up more than thin ones. Turning the contents with a fork will add air and speed things up.

### How long does it take?

How long does it take to make usable compost? It varies according to the time of year and the ingredients used - probably 6 months to 2 years. Leaves, woody prunings and straw take a long while to decompose and are best chopped and used in small quantities, mixed with softer, faster-decomposing materials such as annual weeds, grass cuttings and kitchen scraps. (Large quantities of leaves may be better composted together tied up in plastic sacks with a few holes punched in them.)

How to use the compost. Take it from the bottom of the bin when it is dark and earthy in smell and appearance. Use as a top dressing or dig it in - but don't use on acid-loving plants.

## Other suggestions for would-be greener gardeners

- ◆ Grass cuttings can be left on the lawn - except at the beginning and end of grass-cutting season, when they may not break down so quickly.
  - ◆ Don't cut the grass! - or at least leave an area for wild flowers & insects
  - ◆ Wormeries sound like fun - [www.wigglywiggers.co.uk](http://www.wigglywiggers.co.uk) for more info.
  - ◆ Bulky garden rubbish and quantities too large to compost at home can be taken to the household waste and recycling centre.
  - ◆ Brown wheelie bins for garden rubbish can be supplied by Babergh DC (0800 0185989) for the annual fee of £40.
  - ◆ Bulk bags, which hold the equivalent of 4 wheelie bins, can be supplied and collected through Babergh DC for the charge of £27.50 (reduction to £13 for those receiving some benefits).
- In each case the materials collected are used to create soil improver. But this option is less satisfactory than home composting, both economically and environmentally.

If you havent got room to make compost in your own garden, how about COMMUNITY COMPOSTING ???

In some areas groups of people are organising sites for group composting. This is ideal for

people who don't have much space in their own garden. It also opens up the possibility of sharing the cost of a shredding machine - which makes it possible to get rid of much more heavy duty garden waste.

This would take some organisation but if there are a few people interested perhaps we could try a pilot scheme in Leavenheath, Polstead or Stoke by Nayland ? There is a great deal of information and support available from Suffolk County Council because keeping garden rubbish out of landfill is one of their key objectives. The Village Green Teams would like to hear from anyone who is interested in joining a Composting Group. **(Contact Carol on 01206 263670 or [cls.dev@lineone.net](mailto:cls.dev@lineone.net))**

Most of the above information is taken from websites including  
[www.suffolkrecycling.org.uk/recycling/Campaigns-Home\\_Composting.asp](http://www.suffolkrecycling.org.uk/recycling/Campaigns-Home_Composting.asp)  
[www.babergh.gov.uk/babergh/home](http://www.babergh.gov.uk/babergh/home)

There are A LOT more websites with information on this subject.

This information was provided by Green Teams supporter Penny Bateman who has now also established a *W o r m e r y* (see separate information sheet.)