



Garden Composting.

It's now getting towards the end of winter, and spring will be upon us before we know it. So now is the time that we should be starting to think about our gardens and planning what we want to do with it this year.

An important part of a good productive garden is the quality of its soil. One of the ways in which we can give nature a helping hand in this regard, is to



produce our own compost from our own house hold waste and garden cuttings etc. Not only is this using the waste from our gardens and home in a productive way, but it is also means that that waste is not going into your waste bin for emptying every week. So for those of us who are thinking about re-cycling or re-using the waste you produce, composting is an excellent way in

which you can make a start. Doing so will have a positive impact on the environment, both for the planet and for your home, as recycling organic waste also encourages wildlife, reduces pollution, its an alternative to using peat, saves you money, allows you to grow flowers and shrubs organically and also to grow healthy fruit and vegetables.

Statistics say that a composting bin in the average UK home, and the Isle of Man will be no different, diverts 170kg of waste from landfill per year. This means that there could potentially be big savings to be made on the waste tipping charges made to the Parish of Maughold, and indeed any other Parish on the Island, when it comes to its waste being disposed of through either the incinerator or landfill.

So, how can we compost our waste? Well it is an extremely easy procedure, and I hope to give you some ideas of how you can do this.

There are various sorts and makes of compost bins, but they all do basically the same job. One different sort of compost maker however, is a wormery. This is a container that contains a specific type of worm that lives in the waste material you put in it, and very strong, high quality compost is produced. This method is an effective way of recycling small amounts of waste than the traditional compost bin. This type of system is often used in schools so that the children can partake in looking after the system and the worms etc, and has proved to be very educational for them.



The most popular is the garden compost bin which is big enough to take the waste from an average home.

- **COMPOST BIN**



These bins can be made from anything really. A popular method is to make a box shape out of pallets, but the plastic bins are also popular, and these are often sold at a subsidised rate in order to

encourage their use. It would be worth asking at the local Island garden centres if they are offering this subsidy when you buy a bin from them. You can purchase one for between £20 and £30 before any subsidy.





- **Where to site your bin**

It is better to place your bin on the ground where the drainage is better, and it allows the worms and garden creatures to get into the waste easily in order that they can do their magic. Try and put it somewhere that it is going to be easy to get to, and easy to use, both for emptying your waste into it, and for using the product on your garden. If it's too far away from the house, you may not use it as much as you might if it were closer. Ideally, it should have room around it for storing and mixing ingredients. You can either have a permanent site for your bin, or move it around the garden. The ground where a compost bin has been sited will be very rich as a result.



- **Cool & Hot Heaps.**

There are two methods of composting for the gardener, cool heaps and hot heaps.

The hot heap is a method that requires more attention and physical effort, but it produces compost free of weed seeds, and produces it faster than the cool heap.

The cool heap is made by simply adding compostable waste to the compost bin when you feel like it. It may take up to a year to produce useable compost, but it doesn't require much attention and you don't have to turn the material. So this method will probably suit most people. It might be an idea to have more

than one bin available so that eventually, you can continually add to one bin and take the compost from the other.

- **What can you compost?**

In composting terms there are two types of material, greens and browns. Things that are classed as greens are; *green leaves weeds, grass cuttings, manures, young weeds, fruit & vegetable scraps, coffee grounds, vegetable plant debris, old flowers and bedding plants, young hedge clippings, soft prunings and perennial weeds.*

Brown material is such as; *old straw, autumn leaves, tough hedge clippings, woody prunings, sawdust and wood shavings, wood ash, cardboard, paper towels, bags and packaging, cardboard tubes and egg boxes and junk mail.*

Things that can be classed as a green and brown waste are; *tea bags, hay, strawy manures, gerbil, rabbit and other vegetarian pet bedding.* All this is ok to compost.

Things that you MUST NOT compost are; *coal and coke ash, cat litter, dog faeces, disposable nappies, meat, fish or dairy products, magazines and newspaper, cooked foods, plastics, glass, any metals, persistent and pernicious weeds, synthetic fabrics, medicines and chemicals.*



Basically, introducing food stuffs such as are indicated above, will attract vermin to your compost bin, and we do not want that result if we can avoid it. The other items can introduce chemicals into the bin that could either affect the success of the rotting procedure, or in fact alter the chemical content of the compost produced that may be harmful to the garden when the compost is put down.

If a substance can rot well, it can be composted. Things like grass mowings and soft young weeds rot quickly. They work as 'activators', getting the

composting process started in your bin. But, on their own, they will decay to a smelly mess.

Older and tougher plant materials are slower to rot, but they give a structure to the composting material in your bin, and therefore allow air to circulate within the material which helps the micro organisms in your bin to work more efficiently. Woody items are best chopped or shredded before putting into your bin as these rot very slowly.

You will obtain better results if you mix the green and brown materials in your bin to an approximate 50/50 mix.

Remember that compost can also be used as mulch on your garden, and the professional advice is that soil should never be left bare, it should be covered with mulch if possible.

A compost heap has numerous different types of bugs and insects within them, so if you see these creatures, do not be alarmed, this is normal. They will not infest your home or garden, they are there because that is where they want to be, and they are working for you in producing what you want, a good compost. Your compost heap will not attract house flies unless you put meat etc in your bin, which is one of the waste products you should not be using anyway.



Making compost can be made in six to eight weeks, or it can take a year or more. In general, the more effort you put in, the quicker you will get compost.

A working compost heap should not have an unpleasant smell.

Garden compost looks like a rich, dark soil. It is made from recycled kitchen and garden wastes. It is used to feed and condition the soil and in making potting mixes.



The effort mentioned with a compost bin is the turning over the contents every now and then. This changes and mixes the structure of the bin and introduces oxygen into the areas of the bin where it may have



been used up by the microbes etc. New air allows the process to be more efficient and therefore produces the compost that more quickly.

Maughold Commissioners hope that this information helps to put your mind at ease regarding having a compost bin in your garden, and that it is not as complicated a process as you might have thought. We would encourage as many people as possible to try it out and hopefully reap the benefits for you and your garden.

If you require any further information regarding composting at home, or would like to ask any questions on the subject, then please direct your request or question to the Maughold Commissioners E-mail address, maughold@manx.net, where it will be directed to one of the Maughold Commissioners, Mark COWLEY, who attended a recognised national composting course last year.

Good luck and happy composting.