



Old Chesterton Allotment Society

(Old Chesterton Allotment Society Limited. Mutuals Reg. No. 9773R)

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Good composting guide

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Composting is one of the most environmentally friendly ways of dealing with your allotment waste, producing an excellent soil improver. But many people struggle to know how best to compost their allotment waste, which often ends up as an unmanaged pile on a plot that is unsightly but also is the perfect site for perennial weeds to grow and unwanted rodents to be harboured. So your OCAS Committee thought it would be helpful to provide a simple guide to good composting, especially at this time of year when plots can produce a lot of compostable material as the growing season peaks.

Where to compost?

Choose a position that ideally has shade or partial shade. But if there is no shade on your plot, this doesn't mean that a compost bin or container won't work. Site your compost heap on your plot and a minimum 30cm inside your plot boundary and 1m from the external boundary fence of the site.

What type of compost container?

Compost bins are effective containers as they keep the rain out and allow air in. They can also be turned easily. Many allotment holders have compost containers made out of wood and commonly pallets are used as are sheets of wriggly tin. Site your compost container on soil so that it attracts worms and other organisms that will speed up the breakdown of your compost. But it is important that your compost container is structured rather than just a pile that gets added to every year.

What can be composted?

It is important to have a mix of carbon (browns) and nitrogen (greens) in your compost heap. The green material provides nutrients and moisture whilst the browns decompose more slowly and provide the energy source for the microbes that carry out the composting process. The brown material also absorbs excess moisture and facilitates air-flow within the heap. Cut up all compostable material as small as possible as this speeds up the composting process.

Nitrogen rich (greens) material includes:

- dry plant stems
- Annual weeds
- Unused fruit and veg and peelings
- Nettle leaves and comfrey
- grass – in moderation
- fruit and vegetables (raw)
- tea leaves/bags
- pea and bean-tops
- manure, bedding plants
- flowers

Carbon rich (browns) material includes:

- prunings
- small amounts of paper and card
- dead leaves
- hedge trimmings (ideally shredded)
- leaves
- straw
- plant stems

What not to compost:

- perennial weeds - including bindweed
- cooked food or bread, meat or fish
- glossy magazines, plastics, metal and glass
- Diseased plants
- Citrus (slow to rot and very acidic, which reduces worm activity)
- Raw meat
- Dairy products

These are by no means exhaustive lists so do check if you are unsure about anything.

Managing your compost

Piling weeds, grass, plants etc onto a heap is not composting. Compost needs to be managed. Ideally compost should be turned regularly - so the newer material is buried under older material. This lets air into the compost and speeds up the composting process.

Finally: The best way to deal with weeds?

Don't let them get out of control on your plot! Hoe regularly to keep weeds down.
