

## Tips on Composting – An Article by Sue Woodd

A vibrant 90 year old once started his lecture by telling us that he did 3 important things daily: meditation, yoga, and composting. The latter could be anything from adding to the heap, turning it, bagging it, or giving the neighbours a bag. With this in mind, composting is now a daily joy for me, too!

There is no best way to compost, other than the one which suits you and your garden, but there are a few rules:

- The best compost heaps contain a wide variety of different materials, in fairly thin layers
- I never add pernicious weeds (e.g. bindweed, ground elder, dandelions).
- I try to avoid plants in seed, especially if they spread easily.
- Compost heaps should be neither mushy nor bone dry.
- Cardboard, torn or shredded, and scrunched paper are like the bread to the rich sandwich filling of kitchen waste. Use plenty. (It's easier to tear cardboard which has been left out in the rain!)
- The easiest and best compost activator is urine. Dilute 50:50 before watering on.

We have 3 different composters: the wooden bin (actually made from old metal radiators) at the bottom of the garden, a council plastic cone near the kitchen, and a tumbler in a sunny spot.



Once a year on a fine spring day we bag up the finished compost (which was covered over winter to "brew"). We then restart the process, incorporating any poor quality unfinished bits for next year's heap. All ingredients go straight in but I either chop or shred bulky waste, and try to layer with grass or kitchen waste and, occasionally, manure. I also use a maximum of 2 bags of grass at a time (the rest goes into the other composters or is used as mulch in the garden). I keep a bag of wood ash for occasional use; cardboard sits around to get damp ready to rip up, and we use the pee-pot from time to time.

The tumbler works well with the same ingredients, but has done much better since I moved it into the sun. There's no need to worry about layering here as the ingredients get churned up anyway. It is limited, however, by the weight I can turn. This usually produces 2 lots of compost a year for us and could probably do more.

The council bin is the least successful, even though the worms love it! You're supposed to take finished compost out of the bottom while still adding to the top (mixed ingredients again). However that has always proved difficult, so we have resorted to lifting off the cone (another difficult job), bagging up the good compost at the bottom and returning the rest to the bin once we've put it back.

Apart from general garden use, I use my own compost in a 50% mix with spent compost, plus added seaweed meal for tomatoes and other vegetables in pots. This is particularly successful.

Enjoy your composting!

Sue Woodd

August 2008

(article edited for *The Mulch Winter 2008*)