



Composting at the Allotment

Every allotment plot should have its own compost heap, it is a great way to reduce waste and makes for a brilliant and organic soil enhancer to help those vegetables.

You could spend a lot of money on bags of compost from a Garden Centre, so why not make your own. You will have a lot of green and brown waste throughout the season and although it takes time, it will rot down with the correct elements to produce nutrient-rich compost. Saves carting it away too!

To begin with you will need to contain your compost. You can purchase compost bins; however, many allotment plot holders make their own enclosures using pallets and used untreated wood to house their heaps.

When you start your composting, you will need to factor in the right amount of air, moisture and only add the correct balance of organic waste to make it work.

You can begin this task at any time of the year, with it being a continuation on an ongoing basis.

It is advisable to have a layer of soil at the bottom, you will want to add this if you are not starting directly on the ground to allow for drainage.

To retain warmth and moisture you may want to ensure it is enclosed with a lid, however open piles still rot down, it just takes longer.

Gradually you will be adding grass cuttings, weeds and other debris as you work your allotment plot. It is more effective to

have the right balance of a quarter to half the amount of green waste such as annual weeds, grass, vegetable waste and more, and the remainder being brown waste such as dead leaves, mulch, wood chippings, straw, cardboard and more. The bacteria and organisms work best with the right balance of both.

There are some items you should never include in your compost heap and dispose of elsewhere. Some are more obvious than others but never throw on your compost heap - cat or dog faeces, plastics, metal, glass, glossy paper, cooked food, meats, dairy, or coal ash. Anything diseased or infected or gone to seed.

The best time to make your compost is late summer to early winter, which is ideal as you will have a good foundation with harvesting waste and clearing debris, but you will gradually add to it throughout the year. Ensure that it does not dry out too much during hot spells.

Your compost heap can take anywhere from 6 months to over 2 years to decompose and your heap should be turned over at least half a dozen times throughout the year to allow air to circulate and avoid it becoming too compacted. Some growers choose to have two or more heaps that they can alternate. Your composting will be a lot more effective if it is turned regularly.

You can also use rotted down liquid from your weeds to use as plant feed.

When you have a dark, rich, crumbly soil like texture, your compost is ready to be used. It might not all be like this, but you can separate and add to your heap to keep decomposing.

The best time to use your well-rotted compost on your allotment plot is late winter to early spring, to help breakdown heavy soil and feed the earth with healthy nutrients ready for your plants to soak up.

Composting does not come without its issues. Very wet and smelly compost may be caused by too much water and air. You can cover it through wet spells and add more brown waste to soak up the excess moisture.

If it's too dry with little rotting down, add more green waste and some manure.

If you are attracting pests, you may have too much air and they are being attracted by odours. When adding a lot of green waste, ensure you cover with some brown waste and even cover your open heap for a time. Some growers also use a worming compost method, which, as you will guess from the name, uses earth worms to help nature take its course by eating and defecating in the compost. Earth worms in your soil is a good thing!

Composting may sound complicated and time consuming however it soon becomes a habit and part and parcel of maintaining your allotment plot. It has many advantages including reducing landfill and use of chemical fertilizers