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**A Guide to Composting**

*Thank you to Jenny Butcher from STAA for providing the following information.*

**Part 1: What is composting and why is it important?**

Composting involves taking various bits from your garden, and your food waste, and simply putting it in a big pile to let it decompose. While we can create fancy bins and designated areas, the basic idea is to pile it up so it heats up, allowing bacteria, fungi, and invertebrates to break it down. These organisms do the important work, transforming waste into nutrient-rich compost that we can incorporate into the soil.

When we grow food and flowers, it’s crucial to add back to the soil the material we take away during harvests. Composting helps us do this by returning organic matter to the soil, ensuring the health of our plants. While nature can sometimes achieve this through falling leaves and decomposing plants, on an allotment site like ours, we need to be proactive in adding compost.

By composting food waste, grass clippings, and leaves, we prevent these materials from ending up in landfill or incinerators. Instead, we create a useful material that keeps nutrients in the soil rather than wasting them. Composting is invaluable for growing food as it’s a free resource that helps us grow vegetables easily and reduces harmful gaseous releases from landfill or incineration. Overall, it has a very positive environmental impact.

**Part 2: Types of compost heaps and bins**

There are numerous composting solutions available. Councils often provide small cones for food waste, which can also handle waste paper and cardboard. This creates a self-contained composting area.

You don’t need to spend time making fancy structures; a simple pallet setup works well. Alternatively, you can simply pile everything up and cover it with a tarpaulin.

Typically, having a couple of bays is beneficial because turning the compost is crucial. Turning it introduces air, which aids decomposition and benefits the organisms involved. It also increases the surface area for them to work on. A three-bay system made from pallets is a brilliant option, allowing you to move compost along as it breaks down.

We also use a spinning compost bin at our site. This type of bin is ideal if you struggle with turning a bay system. You simply spin it each time you walk past, making it easy and reducing the need for physical labour. Overall, there are many composting solutions, but the simplest is just to pile it up and turn it occasionally.

**Part 3: Positioning your compost heap**

When deciding where to position your compost heap, a warm spot is ideal. However, you may want to reserve sunny areas for your vegetables or relaxing spots like a deckchair area. So, place the compost heap somewhere convenient but not too prominent. Near your back door can be a good option, encouraging you to use it regularly.

You could also place it under some trees if necessary. It’s about analysing your space and deciding what works best. You don’t want the compost heap to take away from areas that need sunlight. A shady corner is perfectly acceptable, as the compost will heat up through its own processes.

**Part 4: What to put in your compost heaps**

In your compost heap, aim for a 50/50 mix of greens and browns. Greens are nitrogen-rich materials such as grass clippings, vegetable peelings, and cut flowers. Browns are carbon-rich materials like rotting leaves, cardboard, newspaper, brown paper, and egg boxes. This balance of carbon and nitrogen is essential for the microorganisms to break down the materials effectively.

Too much nitrogen can result in a sludgy compost, while too many browns can make it too dry. The 50/50 mix ensures a nice, earthy-smelling compost. You can also add animal bedding, such as hay and cardboard from guinea pigs or rabbits, which provides a good nitrogen and carbon mix.

Introducing a variety of creatures into your compost heap is also beneficial. You could ask someone with an established compost bin for a spadeful of their compost to kickstart your own. This will introduce bacteria and fungi to help break down the materials. With the right balance of oxygen and water, your compost heap will thrive.

**Learn more**

Learn more ways to Green Your Neighbourhood: <https://wildlifegardenproject.com/green-your-neighbourhood/>

To find out more about the topics in this document and much, much more, visit the Wildlife Trust’s Nextdoor Nature Hub: <https://nextdoornaturehub.org.uk/>

**About Green Your Neighbourhood**

With thanks to National Lottery players, we have launched an exciting new campaign, Green Your Neighbourhood!

Green Your Neighbourhood will allow us to help communities across the UK to create or enhance their local green space, and is being made possible thanks to a grant of £10,000 from [The National Lottery Heritage Fund](https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/).

The Wildlife Garden Project has worked alongside [Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust](https://www.nottinghamshirewildlife.org/)to film community groups involved in[Nextdoor Nature Nottingham](https://www.nottinghamshirewildlife.org/nextdoor-nature), the Trust’s movement for nature, to launch a series of films and a national campaign. Our mission is to make it easy for people like you to take ownership of your local green space and take action that will benefit your local area, your community and wildlife.