

Bokashi composting – an alternative method for composting kitchen scraps

For many people, one of the attractions of having an allotment is the possibility of reducing waste by composting. While allotment compost bins can seem like an ideal way to dispose of kitchen scraps along with garden waste, they can also attract unwanted visitors (of the beady eyed and long tailed variety), which can gnaw or burrow their way into even the most robust seeming compost bins.

One way to compost kitchen waste without inadvertently providing rats with a buffet is to use the Bokashi method. “Bokashi” is a Japanese word, meaning fermented organic matter. The method uses airtight buckets, which can be kept at home (under the kitchen sink is a handy place if you have space), and uses a culture of micro-organisms to effectively “pickle” kitchen waste.

All food waste can go in a Bokashi bin, including cooked foods, meat, fish, cheese and eggshells (which are no-nos for allotment compost bins). Food waste is added to the Bokashi bin, and layered (like a lasagne) with Bokashi bran, which is bran inoculated with micro-organisms. Once full, fermentation takes 2 weeks (longer in colder weather!), after which time the contents can be added to your regular compost bin, or buried directly into a trench at your allotment or garden, where it will soon be broken down by worms and other organisms to create rich, nutritious compost. Bokashi bins are usually used in pairs, so that while one ferments, you can fill the next, and rotate them as required.

A useful by-product is produced by the fermentation process: Bokashi juice. This is a light-brown liquid that can be filtered off using a tap at the base of the bin. Once diluted, it provides a nutritious plant food, and can also be used to clean drains.

Bokashi is a great way to “close the loop” when it comes to food waste and keep nutrients in the ecosystem where they can help to grow more food. More information about Bokashi composting is available online, and Bokashi bins and bran are available from a number of online retailers.

Anne-Marie Sanderson, Environment Project Officer



Spring tips for a wildlife-friendly allotment from Cumbria Wildlife Trust

As you brush down your gardening tools and get ready for another season on the allotment, spare a thought for our local wildlife. There are several easy steps you can take to give wildlife a boost, while still enjoying a beautiful plot and a bumper crop of fruit and veg.

Ditch the peat

Peat is dug out of wild places, damaging some of our last remaining peatland. Sadly more than 94% of the UK's lowland peat bogs have been destroyed or damaged, and a wealth of wildlife along with it.

Say no to chemicals

Toxins found in pesticides are non-specific and are just as likely to kill friends as foes. Spraying against pests will often kill their predators as well and who would want to eradicate ladybirds, when each one can eat 100 aphids a day! Slugs poisoned by chemicals may then be eaten by hedgehogs and birds and they too could die.

Beware of netting

Use fine mesh to avoid snaring birds – make sure it's taut so they can't get entangled in folds and that it's secured well, with no gaps at bottom. Ensure you remove netting after the growing season to allow birds and hedgehogs to get in amongst fruit bushes and hunt out the pest larvae that often overwinter in leaf-litter and the topsoil.

Don't be too tidy

Try to leave an overgrown area: brambles will attract insects such as hoverflies, bees and lacewings, and are a favourite nesting site for robins, wrens, song thrushes and blackbirds. A nearby patch of weeds can be a plus. It is unlikely to harbour the pests which are detrimental to the veg plot, but may well host many of their predators.

To find out more go to www.cumbriawildlifetrust.org.uk



Allotments Newsletter



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Chairman's Rambling

It's that time of year again, when we look back and reflect on the past 12 months.

The demand for allotments is still high with long waiting lists for most sites. This year we have seen an increase in the number of allotment plots that are being under utilised. To ease the burden of the waiting list, Council Officers will be actively seeking out tenants who are not using their allotment plots to full capacity and work with tenants to either reduce the size or relinquish the plot. Regular site visits will be undertaken by both Janine Holt, Council Services Officer and Pierre Labat, Townscape Officer.

Allotments are now priced at 41p per square metre, with the average plot in Kendal costing approx. £45 per year. The Committee feels the plots in Kendal are still value for money, especially when you compare them with other areas. The most expensive allotments in Britain are in Rochdale, plots there cost £382 per annum!

Please share with us, any interesting images or stories from you plot, we would like to use them on our Facebook page or in future newsletters. The allotment community is a thriving place, let's celebrate it!

I really hope 2023 was a successful and productive year, wishing you a Merry Christmas and a very happy New Year.

Best wishes, The Chairman of the Committee, Councillor Alvin Finch

Ratting on a Friend

There has been a lot of news in the press recently about the welfare of rats, and how maybe we give them too hard a time and we should be more accepting of these wise, clever and sociable rodents. But let's not kid ourselves. Just because the powers that be have realised that using rat poison all the time to try to control rats, doesn't actually control them, doesn't mean that we should be welcoming them on to our allotments with open arms. They will continue to eat your crops, they will continue to spread a number of unpleasant diseases (and we should occasionally be grateful we no longer have water in our canal!), and they will continue to break into your shed and try to feast on anything they can find.

So we really do need to make life a smidgeon harder for them.

- If you keep chickens on your plot, you can help by feeding them a controlled amount – don't just throw the feed on the floor, but put it in a feed tray.
- Keep your feed in a container, with a lid, that isn't easily accessed.
- If you have a shed, don't create a cosy underfloor space for a rat to bring up a family – either seal up any underfloor access, or alternatively let the air and the light in – keep it clear with nowhere to hide.
- Turn your compost at least twice a year, to make sure rats aren't nesting in it.
- Never put household waste or food items in your compost bin.
- Keep your plot tidy, so there is nowhere for rodents to hide.
- Don't leave fruit and veg produce lying around. Dispose of any unwanted crops properly.
- Report sightings to the Town Council. Don't touch any bait boxes, but do let the pest control officer have access to you plot when they need it.

Chris Bagshaw, Town Clerk

Seasonal Jobs - Your seasonal guide of what to do..... and when!

January to March

January Continue to plant bare root fruit trees, bush and cane through to March if you have not done them. Avoid planting if the ground is waterlogged or frozen. Continue pruning apple and pear trees. Remove any dead, diseased and damaged wood first, followed by crossing and rubbing growth and thin spindly growth. Remember: pruning during the winter encourages growth, not fruiting. Try to complete any digging this month to leave the soil to settle and weather ready for spring sowing. Clean any pots and seed trays ready for sowing in the next two months, and order seed sowing composts and seeds if not already. Also clean any tools, equipment and canes. Store away ready for use.

February By now, areas that have been dug should be at field capacity (when soil is holding the maximum water it can) after the winter rains. They can be covered with large polythene sheets to prevent nutrients being leached out and help to warm it up for spring sowing. Feed fruit trees and bushes with high potash or slow release fertiliser to encourage fruit production. Ensure the garden/allotment is tidy and clear of weeds before the start of growing and seeding in spring. Start sowing early crops indoors into trays for pricking out or into modules for planting directly outside when ready. Indoor crops like tomatoes, peppers and aubergines can be sown this month.

March Wait for the soil temperature to warm up before sowing outdoors, it needs to be at least 7C for most vegetables sown this month. A rough guide is not to start sowing until the weeds start germinating. Sow carrots, lettuce, radish, parsnip, beetroot, peas and similar hardy crops outdoors. Start others indoor for planting out in April. Plants started indoors should be hardened off and planted outside—providing the weather is not severe. Covering with fleece will help them to establish. All bare root planting should be completed this month. Water if the weather is dry.

April to June

April It starts to get busy in the garden now: continue sowing crops outdoors to keep a succession of harvesting. Indoors: sow sweetcorn, courgettes, marrows, cucumbers and melons. Later in the month: runner and French beans can be sown into pots ready for planting out in May. Continue planting any crops started indoors or sown in seedbeds for transplanting.

May Continue with any successional sowing required to ensure you have crops to pick throughout the summer and autumn. Later in the month start to plant our tender vegetables like pumpkins, squash, runner and French beans. Wait until the last frost has occurred (normally May). Inspect all crops regularly for pests and diseases and take appropriate action if any occur. Try to keep chemical use to a minimum to avoid harming bees and other beneficial insects.

June Plant out the remaining tender vegetables and any others started indoors. Continue with successional sowing of other crops. If dry, start to water any crops that have been planted out in the last month or that appear dry. Try to water before they start wilting as this stresses the plants and makes them prone to pest and disease attack.



July to September

July Pick any crops ready for harvesting before they become tough or go to seed. Freeze or dry any surplus. If the crop has finished, clear the ground and prepare to sow a second crop which can include Chinese cabbage and other oriental greens, beetroot, chard and carrots, as well as winter salad leaves. Keep watering crops in containers, raised beds, greenhouses and polytunnels. Give liquid feed once a week: a high nitrogen for leafy crops and high potash for fruiting crops.

August Continue harvesting and clearing ground ready to re-sow. If any ground is vacant sow a green manure crop to improve the soil fertility. There are a range of green manures available these days so choose any that can be sown now and dug in or composted during the winter. If your water butts are empty after a dry summer, clean any debris out and wash out with a bleach solution to kill any diseases. Later in the month, start the summer pruning apples and pears. Remove the current years growth back to three buds to encourage spurs and therefore flower production. Don't prune hard—this should be done in winter. Complete any stone fruit pruning early in the month.

September Any vacant ground can still be sown with a green manure crop up to the end of the month and in mild autumns into October. Any crop remains and other plant debris should be composted for use on the soil later in the winter or next year. No Dig growers will need all the organic matter they can get. Order fruit trees and bushes now while there are still a good choice available. Early orders are likely to give early deliveries so planting can be carried out before Christmas, which can give better establishment of the plants.

October to December

October Now is the time to give your greenhouse or polytunnel a thorough clean using hot water with some disinfectant or bleach added to kill any pests or diseases. Clean the glass to improve the light transmission and check the structure to control any pests and diseases. No Dig growers need to apply mulch to the soil of at least 30mm preferable 40 to 50mm.

November Start winter digging now and aim to complete by the end of the year or January at the latest. This allows the weather to break the surface down to produce a tilth for sowing/ planting in spring. Sow broad beans either outdoors in situ or in modules, to overwinter in a cold greenhouse or polytunnel. Peas can also be sown now using a round seeded type like Meteor. Garlic and shallots can also be planted outdoors or in pots to plant out in the spring.

December Complete your digging and tidy the garden/allotment so it is clear and ready for next year. Ensure weeds are removed. Make any repairs to compost bins, sheds, fruit cages or plant supports. Cut some new hazel poles if you have access to any. Enjoy Christmas !

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Tidy pathways. Allotment pathways and boundaries are to be kept tidy. Maintenance of the main access path is the responsibility of the Town Council, but side paths are the **tenant's responsibility** and these should be maintained on a side to edge basis. Encroachment onto the paths and/or boundary **is not permitted**. Internal boundary hedges, trees and bushes should be cut back by the tenant.