



*Be a Compost Champion!*  
was produced in 2024 by **Compost Works**  
for the **Merseyside Recycling and Waste Authority**.

Compost Works is a social enterprise with a mission  
to divert food waste from incineration and landfill.  
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## BE A COMPOST CHAMPION!

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*Community composting guide  
for schools and organisations*





# COMPOSTING FOR SCHOOLS AND ORGANISATIONS

**This introductory guide is for schools and community organisations that would like to run an initiative engaging young people with communal food waste composting.**

Reducing waste is a common goal for many organisations and composting is a natural part of this commitment. Using the right composting system, all of your organisation's food waste — both raw and cooked, if so desired — can be converted into compost.

Young people can get actively involved, learning about the composting process as they take practical action to reduce their school's or organisation's waste and learn to use the compost to improve the local environment.

If you are a parent, teacher, governor or youth worker who wants to start composting, this guide will help you to get going.

## Initial checklist

- ☐ Adults with composting experience are in place to support the project
- ☐ You have identified where the finished compost will be used
- ☐ Funds are available for equipment and materials





## WHY DO IT?

- **Reduce** your organisation's environmental impact
- **Save money:** turn waste into resource (compost)
- **Save money:** reduce the cost of having food waste taken away for disposal
- Use your compost as an **educational facility**
- **Connect** your compost production with food growing and improving the local environment
- Give young people a sense of **ownership and responsibility**

## WHO WILL BE TAKING PART

### Your Compost Team

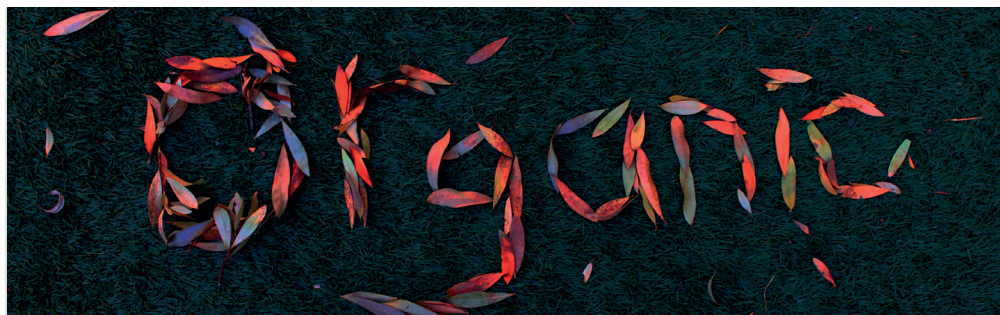
- Communal composting is not a one-person job!
- Skills audit: existing knowledge, composting training needs
- Tasks — who does what
  - *Caddies — emptying, cleaning*
  - *Compost turning*
  - *Promotion and storytelling*
  - *Fundraising for equipment and materials*
  - *What roles will the young people take on?*

### People using the compost

- Lunch waste from your school/organisation
- Wider community\*



\* organisations only, legally not applicable for schools



## ACTIVITY FLOW CHART

1. Identify your **Compost Team** and any composting training or support needs
2. Talk to **staff members** at your school/organisation
3. **Fundraise** for equipment and materials
4. Run a Compost Team **meeting**
5. **Talk** to young people, parents and all staff
6. Run a **waste audit** to identify the appropriate compost system
7. **Buy** all the equipment and materials
8. **Introduce your scheme:**  
assemblies, poster/flyer campaigns, social media posts, etc.
9. **Set up** compost bins and caddies
10. Set up **caddy emptying rota** with the Compost Team
11. Set up a **compost maintenance rota** with the Compost Team
12. Run regular **Compost Team meetings**
13. **Raise awareness:**  
information events, compost competitions, social media posts, etc.
14. **Keep the scheme going**
15. **Use your compost**
16. **Share your success:**  
share the compost, social media posts, articles



## WASTE AUDIT

To gain an understanding of the amount of food waste that your school or organisation produces and to help determine the correct compost system for you, it is useful to do a food waste audit. Before you start, decide if you will compost uncooked waste only or also cooked waste. For composting cooked food, a waste audit is particularly essential, as you will be able to select a compost system appropriate for the amount that you produce.

For the waste audit, you need to weigh the amount of food waste collected over five days, to include:

- Leftovers from fruit schemes and snack times (may include cooked food)
- Unserved canteen food (cooked food)
- Peelings etc. from the kitchens
- Plate scrapings (cooked food)
- Packed lunch food waste (may include cooked food)

Measuring waste over five days will give you a more accurate figure than a single-day waste audit. Auditing food waste is important as you don't want to spend excessive money on a composter that is too large, or buy equipment that will struggle with more food waste than was expected.

You may also measure the amount of avoidable waste — i.e. food that could still be eaten. If there is a lot, you could run an additional campaign for encourage people to not waste edible food!



## CHOOSE YOUR COMPOST SYSTEM

Once you have decided whether to compost all your food waste (cooked and raw) or just raw food waste, you can

choose the equipment that is best for your situation.

### Uncooked food waste composting

Many people are familiar with the plastic 'Dalek' compost bins. These are fine for food waste produced by one or maybe two households, but they will not be up to the task of composting large amounts of school waste efficiently.

Depending on the amount you compost, you will most likely need a three wooden compost boxes to process your food waste material. You can buy ready-made compost bins locally from Compost Works or online. Alternatively, you may know someone with DIY skills to build you a bespoke system, which can help save on costs.

### Pros

- Durable — will last for years if well-placed and looked after.
- Most designs maintain heat from the composting process, which means faster production of compost.
- Can easily be made rodent-proof.

### Cons

- Compost bins need manual turning — this is an essential weekly job which needs people who are physically able to do it.







## Cooked waste composting

For composting cooked food and animal products (meat, fish, dairy) you must invest in a specialist compost system. It is important to make sure the composting process of these foodstuffs goes through a hot phase that neutralises any harmful organisms (pathogens).

It is also vital that wood pellets, sawdust or woodchip are added at the same time as the food waste, as per manufacturer guidelines.

If you decide to compost cooked food, you must include equal amounts of uncooked material, such as vegetable peelings. If the proportion of cooked food is too high, it will lead to cold and lifeless compost.

## Rotating hot composting systems: JoraForm, Ridan

Two examples of hot-composting bins are JoraForm and Ridan.



### Pros

- Some models can process a lot of food waste
- Fairly simple to look after, when following instructions
- Rodent-proof
- Aeration is easy, just turn the handle

### Cons

- Can be expensive
- Instructions must be followed carefully
- Need a secure location
- Maturation unit needed

## EQUIPMENT NEEDED

It is essential to invest in tools, personal protection and other kit to make sure your composting runs smoothly.

### Tools

- Garden fork
- Aerator tools

### Personal safety

- Gloves
- Hand washing facilities, with soap

### Food caddies

- Label clearly so people know what should go in
- Place where food waste is generated
- Ideally empty daily
- Clean regularly (line with newspaper to make cleaning easier — the paper can also go in the compost)

### Other

- Storage bin to keep brown material dry
- Wheelbarrow — for moving the finished compost
- Riddle/sieve — for sieving the finished compost



## COMPOSTING BASICS

Composting is a natural process and managing it is not difficult if you understand what is going on inside the compost bin.

Think of your compost as a living ecosystem. You want to make sure that the conditions inside your compost are aerobic (meaning oxygen is present) for efficient composting and a good quality end-product.

You achieve that by having a correct balance of the **green** and **brown** material inside your compost and using

appropriate aeration methods. Make sure everything is in small pieces, particularly any tough and hardy material, otherwise your compost will struggle to break them down.

If the waste product doesn't fit on the palm of your hand, it is too big.

GREENS: fresh/wet material	BROWNS: dead/dry material
30–50% of total content	50–70% of total content
<b>Purpose:</b>	
Kickstarts the composting process; brings moisture to the compost; nitrogen source.	Maintains air spaces and routes for water to pass through in the compost; creates structure in the finished compost; carbon source.
<b>Examples from the home/kitchen:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Fruit and vegetable waste (raw and cooked)</li> <li>▪ Coffee grounds, tea bags*</li> <li>▪ Meat, eggs, fish scraps (raw and cooked)</li> <li>▪ Human/animal hair</li> <li>▪ Eggshells</li> <li>▪ Bones</li> <li>▪ Wood ash</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Nutshells</li> <li>▪ Straw, hay</li> <li>▪ Twigs and woody prunings</li> <li>▪ Dead (dry) plant material</li> <li>▪ Woodchips/shavings/sawdust</li> <li>▪ Paper <i>shredded</i> (office/printer paper, brown envelope paper)</li> <li>▪ Cardboard* <i>ripped up</i> (egg cartons, brown corrugated board)</li> </ul> <p>* check for plastic!</p>

## KEEPING YOUR COMPOST AERATED

### How and when to do it

- Rotating tumblers: turn the crank
- Compost bins/boxes: turn with a garden fork, use aerator tools
- Minimally every five days on an active compost, or as per manufacturer guidelines

### Why is this important

- Stops material inside the compost from getting compacted and going anaerobic (oxygen runs out)
- Exposes wet/dense areas that you should break up
- Mixes your green and brown material well

## TROUBLESHOOTING

A healthy composter which has a good balance of green and brown materials should only have a very mild smell.

### Indicators of things going wrong:

- Bad smells
- Compost feels wet and heavy when turned
- Oozing gunky liquid
- Flies

All of the above indicate that the balance of materials is not right and that you are

adding too much green material. This is starting to turn the compost anaerobic.

### How to fix problems:

- Add more brown (dead/dry) materials
- Turn the compost more regularly
- Don't leave food festering in the caddies
- Keep caddies clean

## USING YOUR COMPOST

After your compost has matured for 6–12 months, it will be ready to use. If you are using it for potted plants, sieve out any large chunks of tough material. These can go back in the compost. It is best to use your finished compost on the soil surface and around growing crops.

Do not dig it in, as this will disturb the ecology of the soil. Your compost will build the soil, adding beneficial micro-organisms and organic matter, which are both components of a healthy soil ecosystem.

### Top tips

- For **potted plants**, sieve your compost
- **Mulching:** minimally 5cm layer to cover soil, great at any time of year but particularly in winter or early spring
- **Top dressing:** 1cm layer around growing plants, best after rain/watering
- Potting mix for **seedlings:** mix sieved compost with horticultural/sharp sand