Dunchurch Allotments



By Paul Sanders

It was one of those grey, dull February days when 24 allotment members stood expectantly around the whiteboards propped up against the communal shed. What they had gathered for on that damp Sunday morning was a workshop on composting, how to do it well and why the product is so valuable.

We tend to think of home-made garden compost as a good thing to use but what is most unexpected is the multitude of benefits it can bring to the grower.

Participants were told of a range of benefits of composting and were asked to place them in an order of which were the most important from their point of view. These ranged from adding nutrients to the soil, improving soil structure and enhancing water retention. Other benefits included maintaining soil pH and suppressing harmful diseases in the soil. Composting also helps to lock carbon in the soil, helping to mitigate climate change by storing carbon in a stable organic form.



Compost is simply organic matter which has been allowed to decay so what the clever composter has to do is create the conditions which promotes the decay.

The compost heap is a rich ecosystem of all types of creatures from those you can easily see like worms and snails to those you can't like fungi and bacteria, and umpteen creatures of all different sizes such as beetles, woodlice, sprigtails, centipedes, millipedes, and mites.

So, what are the conditions that will make these creatures thrive?



Moisture – the material should not be totally dry, nor too wet but like a squeezed-out sponge. Cover to keep out the rain. If too dry add water.

Warmth – microorganisms work faster when they are





warm so keep heat in by insulating, use a lid, position heap in the sun.

Air (oxygen) – Microorganisms require oxygen to operate and multiply so the clever composter has to ensure there are air spaces in the heap by adding some larger material, using crunched up cardboard and turning the heap over occasionally.

Organic matter – Organic matter can be classified as carbon-rich 'browns'(which organisms use for energy), or nitrogen-rich 'greens' (which organisms use for growth and multiplying species numbers). Best results are achieved if there are equal amounts of greens and browns.

The workshop participants were asked to classify material that would be put into the compost heap as green and brown. Choices ranged from grass cuttings, straw, cardboard, vegetable peelings, woody prunings and coffee grounds.

The session ended with a demonstration of how to use a mulching machine to cut up large garden waste into smaller pieces thereby reducing the time it takes for the material to be broken down.

It is expected that many more compost bins of all shapes and sizes will start appearing on allotment plots as members use their new composting knowledge.

Allotment Fairy Trail!



Don't miss this year's summer event on **Sunday 21st July**, when the allotment will be filled with all sorts of tiny fairy houses, most of them made by local schoolchildren. See dunchurchallotments.org.uk for more details.



CALENDAR FOR 2025

By popular request Dunchurch Allotment Association is producing another calendar. The 2025 gardening calendar is beautifully illustrated with scenes from around Dunchurch painted by a talented local artist, and feaures check lists of monthly gardening tasks.



To order your copy for just £7 (same price as 2023!) please email dunchurchallotments.org.uk