

# THE JOY OF COMPOSTING (and recycling)

These days in our house, only plastic and cardboard find their way to the wheelie bin. Everything else gets composted or recycled. It has come to resemble something of an art form for me; certainly an enjoyable activity.

## **Are we conserving resources or generating more waste?**

It fills me with dismay to see the weekly plethora of plastic bags generated by the recycling collection. We have solved this problem by storing our recycling in separate, re-usable crates and, as much as possible, we use shopping bags to do the shopping.

A large paper bin lives behind a curtain at the foot of the stairs, beside the front door. When it's full, it gets left on the side of the pavement, with a separate crate for tins and one for glass. I strip the labels off my tins and put them into the paper box, then wash the tins, fold the lid inside, and squash them flat.

## ***Anything organic ends up in the compost bin:***

- Vegetable peelings
- Tea bags
- The contents of the vacuum cleaner bag
- Floor sweepings
- Hair from brushes and bath and basin waste
- The fluff from the tumble dryer filter
- Dead flowers
- Nail clippings
- Egg shells
- The cardboard tubes inside toilet and kitchen rolls and scrunched up brown paper bags (they provide aeration and good hidey holes for worms)
- Even used egg boxes

My golden rule is: "Will this rot (or provide ventilation and/or texture)?" and if it will, I pop it in the kitchen compost bucket which is attached conveniently and odourlessly, to the inside of a door in the sink unit.

## **Leftovers? What leftovers?**

Leftover food is not a problem. It is turned into soup; given to the cat; left out for the birds and only finally (as an absolutely last resort) layered into the compost bin (we have two of the black plastic kind, hidden behind the shed and used in rotation). It takes about a year to fill one of them (they are cheap to purchase) and every autumn, we heave the contents onto our grateful clay garden beds. I have been putting leftover food into compost heaps and bins for over twenty years and have never seen a single rat nearby.

When I lived in Bath and didn't have a garden, I put an ad. in the local shop; asking for someone to let me donate my kitchen waste to their compost heap in exchange for a few flowers. A local woman responded. I used to keep my organic leftovers in a bucket under the sink and carry them weekly (covered) a couple of streets to her compost heap. In exchange I received handfuls of flowers and eating apples from her tree. This story was featured in the local paper.

### **Feeding the birds**

This year so far we have spotted 13 species in the garden. They are encouraged by a variety of food at a variety of levels, and not all necessarily from the pet shop. Apples cut in half on the ground are the delight of the blackbirds (shared by the male and female blackcaps); fat balls adorn the bird table and a central Buddleia; bread and scraps of leftover cat food, porridge etc are on the flat part of the bird-table. Seeds hang in a variety of containers and places.

### **The problem of plastic**

As often as possible I refuse bags in shops and buy things which aren't shrouded in plastic. Many plastic containers (such as yoghurt pots) find a new life as containers for seedlings and for storing food in the freezer. Milk cartons, with the top cut off, make very good 'slug collars' to protect young plants from slugs and snails.

### **No more notebooks!**

The blank backs of letters etc. are used for writing notes, shopping lists, and so on. Envelopes we reuse or use them for writing lists.

We have two waste 'paper' baskets in our office – one for paper and one for everything else.

I realize that some of this may not be possible for everyone, but I hope my enthusiasm may inspire you to come up with some creative ideas for reducing waste and recycling more.