



Environmental Health Information Sheet: Composting

Introduction

As spring arrives it is time to clean up the garden and give the lawn its first mow and for many people this means a trip to the Ashburton Resource Recovery Park to offload pruning and lawn clippings. It is important to keep lawn clippings separate if possible in a woolpack available onsite so they can be dropped off in a separate area for composting. A range of common hormone sprays used in lawns to kill broadleaf plants do not break down with regular hot composting thus have to be processed separately for a much longer time using increased amounts of beneficial bacteria (E.M).

Why does the Council charge to dispose of greenwaste and lawn clippings?

Wastebusters borrowed heavily to buy the Willibald shredder that is used to shred the greenwaste in Ashburton and are contracted by Ashburton District Council to manage the composting operations. Fresh shredding is carried out weekly and the green material is formed into windrows, which are maintained at temperatures of 55 - 70°C for at least 2 – 3 weeks. This ensures that all weed seeds are sterilised and any pathogens or chemical residues are broken down with the aid of additional beneficial bacteria (E.M.). After 12 weeks of watering and turning to maintain temperatures, samples of the compost are sent away to Hills Laboratory for testing. Once the results are all clear of any chemical residues the organic compost is screened ready for sale. Screening adds additional costs and requires specialised equipment being bought in to carry out this work but its all part of making good quality compost.

Wastebusters locally made organic compost is bagged into reusable bags, which is a healthier and more environmental option than sealing it into new plastic bags and helps keep costs down. Compost is also available in bulk and proudly used by a number of local businesses including the Hotel Ashburton.

The Benefits of Compost

Wastebusters quality compost is guaranteed free of weed seeds and when added to your soil has enormous benefits:

- √ It improves soil texture and structure
- √ It increases the moisture and nutrient holding capacity of the soil so you need less water in summertime
- √ It encourages billions more living organisms to thrive in your soil which is the key to long term healthy plants
- √ It brings wonderful worms back to your garden
- √ Adding compost to your soil is the best food you can give the earth.

Composting helps to keep dangerous pollutants out of our underground waterways and soils – the run off from piles of lawn clippings is a contaminant for waterways and it is illegal and irresponsible to dump greenwaste along our rivers.

It makes good sense both environmentally and economically to compost greenwaste locally rather than pay to transport it to Kate Valley Landfill over 150km away and is an important part of working towards zero waste and a more sustainable future. One of the best and simplest ways we can help our environment every day is to keep all garden waste and foodscraps out of our rubbish. All the rubbish is compacted in landfills so no oxygen can move through. This is called an anaerobic environment. In this kind of environment, food and garden waste release large amounts of natural acids. These acids ooze through the other things we throw away – batteries, plastics, etc – and create a toxic liquid called leachate. Leachate from landfills can pollute ground water and soils for up to 300 years.

Home Composting

Most home gardens have enough space to recycle quantities of pruning and lawn clippings onsite. Unsprayed lawn clippings can be spread thinly around shrubs and trees as a mulch to retain moisture and control weeds or layered 10cm deep with foodscraps and prunings into compost bins.

Compost bins can be bought from hardware stores, the recycled plastic ones are made from 185 2 litre milk bottles and work very well when placed on a layer of coarse prunings or a piece of wire mesh resting on bricks or telephone books to allow air to enter at the bottom. Always cover the top with an old sack, carpet or cardboard to keep the moisture in and the light out. To help keep your compost moist, collect unused cups of tea, coffee or other waste-water in your kitchen food organics bucket.

Compost trouble shooting	
Problem	Solution
Smelly compost	More aeration, more diversity, less moisture
Compost too slow	More aeration/turning, more diversity, check moisture to increase heat
No worms in heap	More aeration, more diversity, more moisture
Excess vinegar flies	More aeration, more diversity, check moisture
Mice or rats	More turning, more moisture

What can be added to home compost?

The answer is simple, anything that was once living can be used to make compost.

For more information visit Wastebusters Education Centre at the Ashburton Resource Recovery Park in the Ashburton Industrial Estate or phone Wastebusters Recycling Hotline 03 308-9966 or see our website www.wastebusters.net.nz

We can pollute the earth to pieces or compost the earth in peace.