

PUTTING COMPOST INTO THE CURRICULUM

Little Rotters Composting Clubs, Groundwork Leicester and Leicestershire



The Little Rotters Composting Club in action at Thringstone Primary School (Source: Groundwork Leicester and Leicestershire)

Free fruit is an eye-catching policy for a government keen to promote its health credentials. But what happens to all those apple cores and banana peels? At schools in Leicester and Leicestershire, Little Rotters have the answer, as Sara Smith, Education Officer at Groundwork Leicester and Leicestershire, explains.

What are Little Rotters Composting clubs?

We set up the clubs as a pilot in a broad cross-section of schools in Leicester and Leicestershire. They were popular with teachers and students, and we now have 10 schools that have clubs.

We are also moving from the schools to their surrounding communities to encourage them to compost. This includes holding roadshows on how to start composting, encouraging people to buy compost bins and so on. We are also organising 'grow your own' green events and courses with community colleges to increase the horticultural skills of local people.

How do the schools link up with their communities?

Each school is associated with a local parish magazine and we have been placing articles in these magazines about composting.

Students have devised their own questions about composting to ask parents, for example 'why don't you compost?' And we have distributed leaflets and questionnaires to the surrounding local areas around the schools involved to ask people about composting and their attitudes to it.

What happens at a Little Rotters Composting Club?

Each school has caddies where students put their waste that can be composted. A number of the schools have free fruit so there are lots of fruit scraps as well as paper towels, leaves and grass cuttings. Students get to wear tabards to show that they are responsible for collecting the caddies and putting the waste into the school composting bin. We supplied the caddies and the national waste campaign WRAP provided the compost bins.



Caddy collectors at Orchard Community Primary School (Source: Groundwork Leicester and Leicestershire)

We have published a handbook for teachers which helps them weave composting into the curriculum for Key Stage 2 (upper primary). We have distributed over 1000 handbooks and the feedback from teachers has been pretty positive – we've even had a second print run.

Our education officer speaks at assemblies and runs activities depending on what a school wants. We also have a Little Rotters Composting Club website (www.littlerotters.org.uk/index.html) which anyone can access. This includes a download copy of the teacher handbook.

What has been the reaction from students so far?

Students really like getting involved and having a role at school. The schools have all done really well with collecting compost – just under one ton per year per school. One school is now using its compost in raised garden beds that have been constructed by the kids and some parents.

We have found that the schools have been really receptive to compost-based activities. But it has been quite difficult to get local communities involved, and we have needed to put in lots and lots of time and effort.

Where to from here?

This year we are running an inter-school Little Rotters Challenge Cup where the 10 schools involved will compete against each other to see which one can compost the most organic waste.

Ultimately, we want to get as many people composting as possible – the more people that compost the better. So we are encouraging anyone who wants to set up a Little Rotters Composting Club to contact us for details on how to start.

Facts

- Compost and soil are not dead, they are living things. There are more micro-organisms in a teaspoonful of soil than there are humans alive on the planet.
- The School Fruit and Vegetable Scheme run by the Department of Health provides approximately 400 million pieces of fruit to over 16,500 schools each year.
- A school can reduce the amount of it's waste going to landfill by 50% after recycling if it also composts, which could be a saving of between £200-£1500 year
- On average one student will produce 4.05kg of compostable waste in a school year (*Source: based on figures from Edubase, Jan 2006*)
- Community composting projects have calculated that a school of 500 pupils will divert an average of 4 tonnes/year of compostable waste (*Source: Wiltshire Wildlife Trusts Schools Composting Technology Project*)
- Each tonne of biodegradable waste (waste that can decompose eg. food waste, cardboard, plant cuttings) landfilled emits more greenhouse gas.
- Over 10 years, half of all the carbon in landfilled food waste ends up as methane, one of the worst greenhouse gases (*Source: Projection of Greenhouse Gas Emissions, 2005 to 2030, Environmental Research Institute, University of Aarhus, Denmark*)
- If all schools in the UK composted it would save nearly 30,000 tonnes of compostable waste from going to landfill (*Source: based on model used in NERI Technical Report No. 611, 2007*)

Further Resources

- Edubase is the up-to-date database of educational establishments across England and Wales www.edubase.gov.uk
- Community Composting Network provide support for small scale, community composting schemes. Find them at Alexandra Road, Sheffield S2 3EE
Call them at 0114 258 0483 or visit www.communitycompost.org
- The Composting Association, www.compost.org.uk, are the national trade association for composters.
- Practical advice on composting in schools is also available from the Garden Organic School Gardens project, Ryton Organic Gardens, Coventry, Warwickshire CV8 3LG. Call 024 7630 8238 or visit their website at www.gardenorganic.org.uk/schools_organic_network
- Wastewatch run a network for people involved in waste education work. Further information about the Waste Education Support Programme (WESP) can be found at www.wastewatch.org.uk/education/
- Back issues or pdfs are available a series of articles in the journal 'the Growing Heap' on Composting in Schools
- Speak to your local authority recycling officer to find out if your council are providing subsidised compost bins to householders. Why not join in the composting fun with International Compost Awareness Week? This year, it will be held 7-13 May 2007.