



Key takeaway points from session 1: Maximising yield and making compost

ORGANIC HORTICULTURE

Organic horticulture implies a systemic approach to growing food, which considers the importance of all entities and relations for a healthy and biodiverse ecosystem.

These ecosystems become resilient, self-sustainable and balanced. Growing organically implies long-term thinking, rather than quick fix solutions, and comes with caring for the inhabitants of those ecosystems.

Some pioneers of organic agricultural practices include Rudolf Steiner (1861 – 1925); Lady Eve Balfour (1898 – 1990); Albert Howard (1873 – 1947); Jerome Irving Rodale (1898 – 1971).

PLANNING FOR HIGH YIELDS

Effective growing benefits from good planning. Some of the most important aspects to consider as you start are: observing and getting to know your space; planning the crops you will grow; planning your sowing times; thinking of ways to advance or extend the growing season; and making sure you observe good hygiene in and around your garden.

Planning space

- What are the sunny / shady areas (in summer and in winter)? This will influence what crops you might plant and where
- Where do the winds come from? Are there any natural windbreaks, or could you install some? This will influence what crops you might plant and where
- How far is your water source and can you collect rainwater on site?
- Where will your composting area(s) be? What kind of composting structures can you have?
- Ensure some areas are wildlife-friendly – this will attract pollinators as well as beneficial predators in your garden. Having some standing water is also beneficial for wildlife (e.g. a small pond to attract predators)
- Where will you keep your tools, so that they are safe, sheltered and not too far away?
- How wide do you want your beds and paths to be? Who will be working / visiting your garden? What needs might they have in terms of space? What materials do you have available at a low cost?

Planning crops

- Plant what you like to eat!
- Consider your zone and what will grow best / survive
- Have a mix of annuals and perennials – consider how much time you have at hand as well
- Consider what kind of rotation you want to follow – see separate handout
- Choose resistant varieties of crops



- Use green manures over the growing season, to overwinter, or to undersow your crops – see separate handout on green manures

Planning the sowing

- Make a seed inventory and keep careful notes: groups, species and cultivars, brand, expiry date, sow and harvest time, days to harvest
- Plan for succession sowing: plan ahead using 'days to harvest' data, sow indoors approximately 4-6 weeks before planting out
- Intercrop and sow catch crops, like radishes, rocket, mizuna
- Undersow crops or green manures – e.g. salad under beans, or clover under tomatoes
- Keep good records of your sowing / transplanting times!

Planning to advance / extend the season

Advancing the season:

early cultivars
propagating indoors and using hot beds
fleecing, hoop houses, cloches, bell jars, plastic bottles, cold frames
raised beds
polytunnels

Extending the season:

late cultivars
mulching

Planning for hygiene

- Stay on top of your weeds
- Regularly clean and disinfect your tools

COMPOSTING

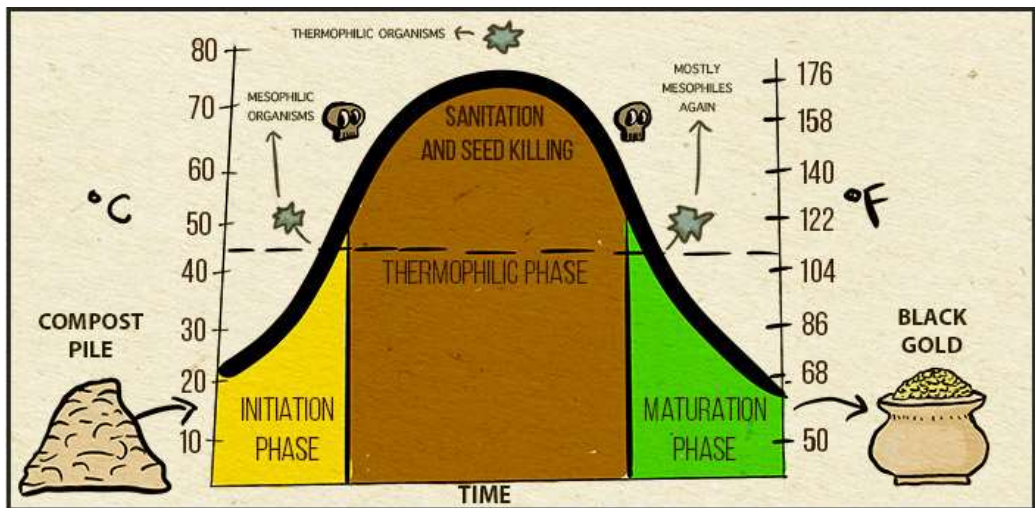
Medium fertility compost: Compost bins and heaps



Compost recipe:
50% greens - chopped
50% browns - chopped
Water
Air

Compost rules:
At least 1 cubic m
Sheltered from the wind
Water and aerate weekly
Can be covered or uncovered, but this will affect the temperature and the speed of composting
Can be directly on the ground or on hard surfaces
You can compost most weeds, but avoid pernicious weeds like bindweed and couch grass
Kitchen waste can be composted, but might attract rodents or foxes if the compost is not pest-proof

Compost stages



Types of compost bins:

- New Zealand bins: cheap to build and can deal with large quantities of waste, but require a lot of space and some hard work to turn the compost
- Tumblers: can be bought or built, easy to turn but can only deal with small amounts of waste – no pest access
- Hot bins and Aerobins: very efficient and fast, but also expensive – no pest access



- Dalek bins: cheap, small and rather efficient, but require regular turning
- Straw bale composting: efficient, easy and cheap to build, but require relatively large spaces and can be unsightly

Compost can be applied directly to the ground, either dug in or, even better, as a mulch.

High fertility compost: Wormeries

Always keep the tap open
Feed regularly and a varied diet
Add 1/3 shredded paper or cardboard with food
Control the temperature
Add limestone every 6 months
Must be covered



Meat or fish
Dairy
Citrus peels (orange, lemon, etc.)
Onion family (onion, garlic, leek, etc.)
Pets litter

Vegetable and fruit scraps
Teabags*
Cooked grains
Bread
Coffee grounds (in moderation)

Worm compost is best applied as a top dressing to some of your hungry feeders (e.g. tomatoes, courgettes)

Low fertility compost: Leaf mould (soil conditioner)

It's very easy to make and requires no maintenance, but it takes a long time for compost to be ready (18 – 24 months)

Leaf mould can be applied as a mulch or mixed with multipurpose soil to create a sowing mix