

Robin Hill

Home Compost Making

Growing up in the 50s and early 60s we had a large garden in Hertfordshire where my parents grew lots of fruit and vegetables. When they needed compost there was no garden centre to drive to with bags piled high for us buy, they generated their own in the back garden. Today many Belstone residents, who let's face it don't have small gardens, put out garden waste for recycling once a fortnight for a lorry to come and collect it, for somebody else to get the benefit and they pay for the privilege!

Creating your own compost is very easy and doesn't require any great expertise or equipment. Successful composting requires a good mix of clippings, weeds, vegetable peelings, sticks, grass, paper cardboard etc. What is required is a balance between nitrogen rich green waste and carbon rich brown waste, with a greater amount of brown waste avoiding a heap with a greater proportion of only one item such as grass clippings.

As to the heap itself, any pile of organic matter will eventually break down but we tend to prefer it to be contained in some way. Plastic compost bins and very sophisticated systems are available to buy but the easiest way is just wire netting and posts or wooden pallets nailed together.

Despite what many gardening books say I don't turn my heaps, as that would disturb the rich ecosystem within the heap and, in particularly in the summer, the breeding cycle of the wonderful grass snakes that inhabit the heap.

The Garden Jungle or *Gardening to Save the Planet* by Dave Goulson

Wild About Weeds *Garden Design with Rebel Plants* by Jack Wallington

Grass Management: Times They Are A-Changing

Look at any old general gardening book from the 50s or 60s and you are almost certain to see a picture of a beautifully striped lawn. This will be accompanied with the exhortation to mow your lawn once, possibly even twice, a week during the summer months and to keep those edges neatly clipped between lawn and flower bed.

Sadly, for some, this view still proliferates today. I may be wrong, but I think this need for tidiness and grass cut short is a bit of a man thing.

I would like to suggest a more laissez faire attitude to lawn management and grass in general. Just reducing the cut to twice a month and raising the height of the cut at the same time will both bring a benefit to wildlife, the environment, your pocket and the lawn itself. This is of great benefit early in the season when the wildflowers that inhabit our lawns are able to show their heads, providing a rich source of pollen and nectar to early flying insects. Later in the summer, if we have hot dry weather, longer grass will stay greener – watering grass is an unnecessary use of a very precious resource.

Following on from this, there is a lot of evidence that leaving some areas of lawn to grow much longer by only cutting twice a year – late August and in the winter – will have a tremendous effect on biodiversity, allowing a proliferation of wildflowers and, with it, the opportunity for a wide range of wildlife to prosper. Grass cut on these occasions should be removed to prevent too much build-up of nourishment to the grass at the expense of the flowers.

In a small garden, just leaving a one metre square unmown would be a very interesting project especially if you have young children who could then compare this area with other parts of the lawn – spotting different wildflowers and minibeasts in each area.

Let us all make our gardens just a little bit wilder.