

Master Composter Conference 2006
Friday 20th October

Sharing Best Practice – how to run a successful Master Composter scheme

WHY SET UP A MASTER COMPOSTER SCHEME?

- It capitalises on people's enthusiasm for composting to promote the waste minimization cause
- A Master Composter has more credibility in their community than an 'official' – they are more likely to be listened to and trusted
- They can use his/her own words in his/her own community
- Different volunteers talk to the public in different ways
- They can offer a wide range of skills and experience to the scheme
- They know what is happening 'on the ground' and can follow up queries and suggestions without the time restrictions of a council employee
- If the scheme is good, volunteers will recruit more volunteers and thus increase human resources
- Volunteers become 'community catalysts' unleashing community creativity and enhancing social inclusion.

WHAT DO YOU NEED TO SET UP A SCHEME?

- Approval/support of the idea from within organisation
- Funding
- Launch/Publicity
- Recruitment
- Training
- Volunteer procedures/policies
- Resources
- Database

WHAT ARE THE MOST (COST) EFFECTIVE RECRUITMENT ACTIVITIES?

- Word of mouth
- Posters and leaflets – these can be handed out/displayed in:
 - local shops, especially health food shops
 - libraries
 - allotment trading huts
 - organic vegetable box delivery schemes
 - other volunteer organisations, particularly the Wildlife Trusts and organisations with a related interest in protecting the environment
 - charity shops
 - through shredder-hire firms for example posters in the hire centre or a leaflet given out with the shredder.
 - City farms
 - Community gardens
 - Universities and further education colleges – there are often student community volunteering groups.
 - Garden Centres
 - Horticultural therapy charities
 - Community Service Volunteers
- Partner websites and partner publications

- Through local authority recycling questionnaires
- Volunteer bureaux (although some debate as to whether they are effective or not)
- Parish councils
- Press releases
- Contact Garden Organic members
- Contact members of other gardening groups
- Use WRAP database of people who have bought a compost bin to send a letter to
- Advertising/articles and interviews in local press and radio, including media which target specific communities
- Through the WRAP home composting advisor and WRAP door knockers
- Giving talks to gardening clubs, allotment societies and at seed swap events
- Through local business and statutory sector pre-retirement courses
- Articles in relevant publications, for example:
 - Co-op bank newsletter
 - Community group newsletters
 - Parish magazines
 - Local newspapers

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF TRAINING

- Include site visits: visit a variety of composting facilities at different scales
- Ensuring the training also covers giving presentations/communication as well as essential elements of home composting
- Getting the training scheme accredited through a local college or as an NVQ (open college)
- Ensure the role of the volunteer is made very clear
- In-school training
- Covering the whys and hows of composting as well as use of compost
- Covering communication skills
- Ensuring Master Composters are given plenty of examples of activities they could carry out and events coming up so they can get started
- Standardised training for Master Composters
- Standardised training for Trainers
- On-going training – in-service training and specialist training in related areas at least once a year.
- Hold training at (organic) gardens with compost demonstration areas or have a training centre with a purpose-built display area
- Consider whether to outsource training or not
- Location of the training event is very important – ensure it is accessible and within reasonable distance. Location can be moved around the county to ensure it is not too far for all Master Composters.
- Health and Safety considerations need to be highlighted (relates to policies and procedures).
- Organising 'reward' trips for the volunteers for example to a worm farm , a compost bin manufacturer, CAT or an in-vessel unit, which contribute to their continued training.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF SUPPORT

- Sufficient and effective support is the key to a successful Master Composter scheme.
- It is important to consider why people continue to volunteer:
 - Because they feel valued and appreciated
 - Because they enjoy it
 - Because they get something out of it
 - Because they feel they are making a difference

- Because they can see the influence of their efforts.
- this knowledge can then be used to devise an effective support programme:
- Having a volunteer support co-ordinator who is easily contactable and readily available at the end of the phone/email is essential.
- Having incentives such as:
 - hats
 - garden centre vouchers
 - travel expenses paid
 - prizes for completing worksheets
 - volunteer points (mean prizes 1 hour = 1 point)
 - free entry to sports centres/gardens
 - free membership of charities
- Recognising and rewarding the efforts of volunteers
- Producing a newsletter for the volunteers that they are invited to contribute to
- Providing volunteers with access to expert advice and answering any general waste queries.
- Having local partnerships
- Important to have the support of the local council.
- Having an interactive website that they can contribute to and which is kept up to date.
- Offering one-to-one interview/review session for the Master Composter if desired
- Sharing of Master Composter details especially phone numbers
- Having technical support such as access to the Garden Organic advisory line
- Have a 'graduation' event when Master Composters have reached their target hours.
- Having informal planning meetings in pubs/village halls for example to plan Compost Awareness Week events.

RESOURCES

- Training manual with regular updates
- Games
- Relevant Literature
- Provide a wide range of equipment including display boards, bug viewers, t-shirts etc to enable the Master Composters to create an interesting stand.
- Have copies of training presentations available on CD or on a website
- Make pictures available on the website for Master Composters to download if they wish to produce their own articles/presentations
- Relate literature to key stages 1&2
- Having freebies to hand out does not always work. You may not encourage someone new to compost just by giving them a freebie, however you are incurring costs and creating waste. They are useful but make sure you only give freebies to the most interested people.

ACTIVITIES

- Master Composters' strength is on small and local scale such as dinner parties and village fetes. Master Composter volunteers do reach people that council employees would not necessarily be able to reach.
- For larger-scale events, more 'official' involvement is necessary, but Master Composters often help out at council-run roadshows
- Networking – taking a whole team approach

For a comprehensive list of Master Composter activities please refer to the delegates notes from Saturday.

OTHER IMPORTANT ASPECTS

- Master Composters such be an integral part of a Waste Minimisation Policy which has structured objectives
- These aims and objectives must be clear in the minds of all stakeholders in the Master Composter scheme, especially the volunteers and the funding bodies.
- Volunteer policies and procedures – the reasons for having such policies need to be made very clear and need to be introduced at the start of the scheme. They need to be drawn up between all partners.

WHAT DOESN'T WORK SO WELL WHEN SETTING UP A SCHEME

- Where volunteers not being proactive in arranging talks and workshops
- Where there are delays in recruiting due to red tape
- Where volunteers trained but not supported
- Where the position of MCs is not clear within the community
- Where volunteers are not invited to training sessions but are expected promotion home composting without this resource that helps increase their confidence in their composting knowledge.

THE FUTURE OF MASTER COMPOSTER SCHEMES

- Volunteers are seen as an important part of behavioural change in the community by all stakeholders
- More training courses are provided on related aspects
- Courses to train the trainers and ensure continuing professional development and up to date knowledge
- Events such as compost awareness week/month and national congresses
- Networking and new partnerships
- Reaching quantitative targets such as 6 Master Composters per 10,000 inhabitants and 40% of citizens participating actively in preventing the creation of organic waste.
- Exchange visits between Master Composters in different areas/countries.
- Recruitment of Master Composter from 'hard to reach' sectors
- Training of Master Composters in how to promote home composting to 'hard to reach' sectors.
- Policy development

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Garden Organic Master Composter: www.homecomposting.org.uk

Volunteering England: www.volunteering.org.uk

Volunteer Development Scotland: www.vds.org.uk

Volunteering Wales: www.volunteering-wales.net

WRAP Local Authority partners: www.recyclenowpartners.org.uk

Changeworks: www.changeworks.org.uk