



# Compost Heap Invertebrate Survey

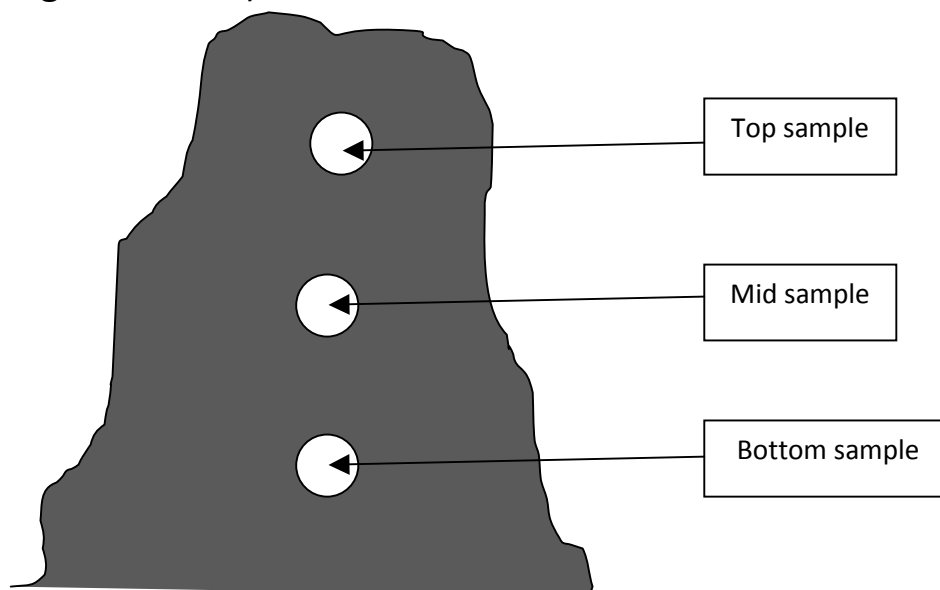


Garden Organic & The University of Plymouth

It appears that little is known of the invertebrates that live in our compost heaps and as far as we can tell no systematic survey of compost faunas has been conducted in the UK to date.

In order to fill this gap Garden Organic has joined forces with the University of Plymouth to catalogue the fauna of our compost heaps and bins.

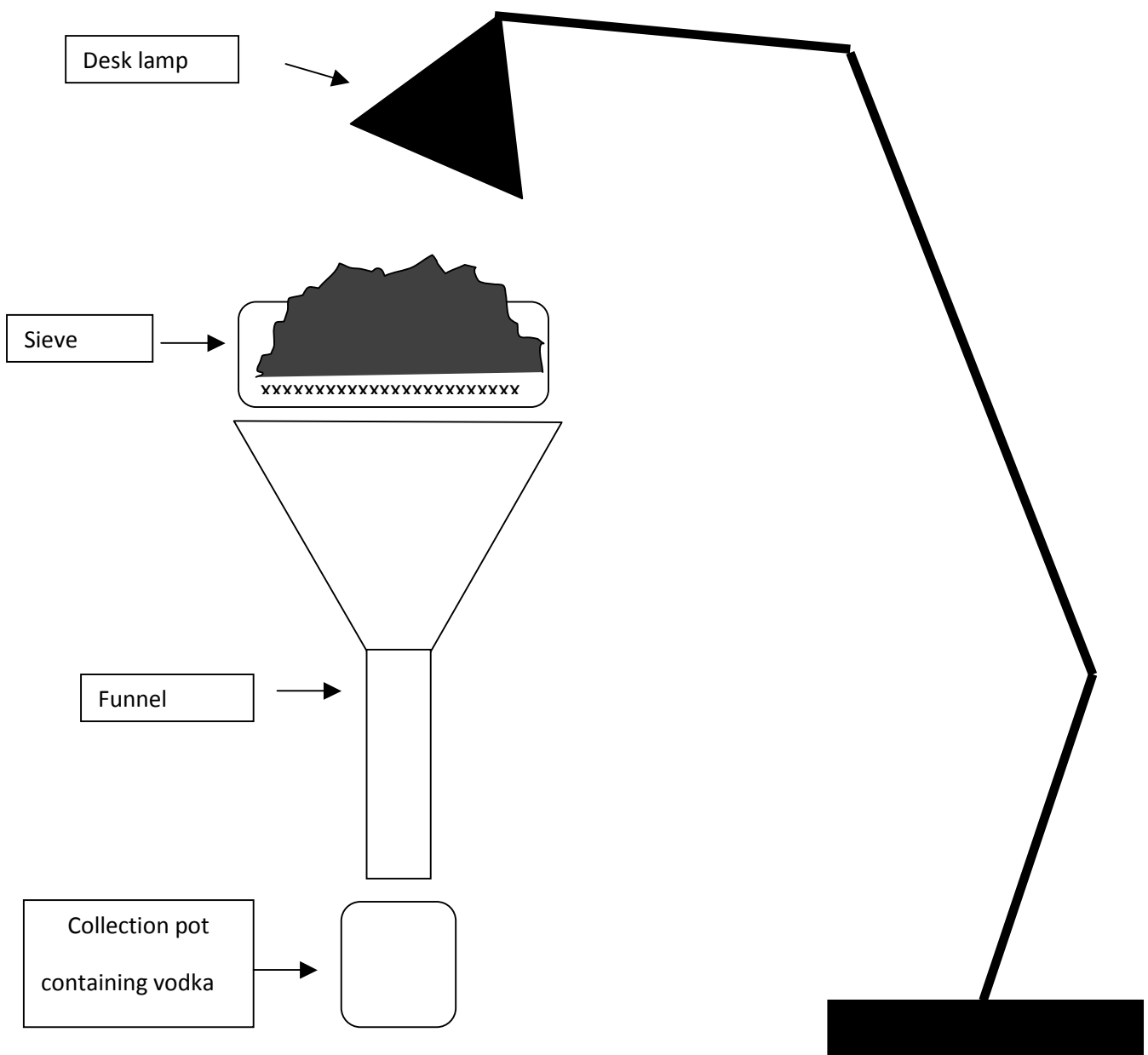
We are asking gardeners, master composters and Garden Organic members to assist by collecting samples of compost from their heaps and to extract the invertebrates from them using the method described below. We would like three samples from each heap but if this is impractical a single sample will do. Samples should be taken from the centre of the heap at three levels: top, middle and bottom (see diagram below).



Samples need to be approximately the size of a large grapefruit (i.e. large enough to fill and form a mound in a kitchen sieve).

To take the temperature, dig a hole approximately 30 cm down from the top. Place your thermometer in it and cover over. Leave for 5 mins to equilibrate then remove and read.

To extract the invertebrates from the samples you will need to set up a temporary extraction funnel. To do this you will require a sieve with a coarse mesh i.e. one where the holes are greater than 2 mm wide and with a diameter of approximately 15 cm ( these can be found in most kitchen or hardware stores). You will also a funnel in which the sieve will sit, a desk lamp and a collecting jar or pot. In order to preserve the invertebrates for later identification we will use vodka in the collecting pot; I suggest the cheapest brand available to you.



Place the compost in the sieve and turn on the desk lamp this warms up the sample and sets up a gradient of temperature and desiccation which drives the invertebrate fauna deeper into the compost in search of cooler, moister regions. This migration eventually causes the invertebrates to fall out of the sample down the funnel and into the collecting pot where they are preserved in vodka.

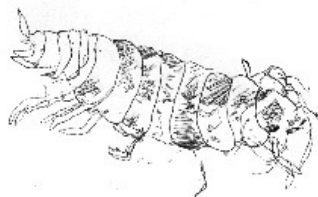
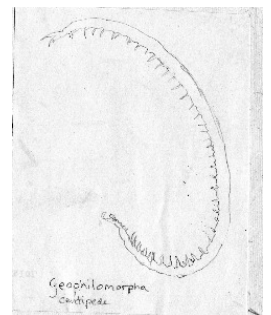
If a 15 cm diameter funnel is used the samples should be run for 2 days. If the funnel is larger the samples should be run for longer.

Processed samples with a completed survey form can be sent (or hand delivered if local) to

Heather Jackson  
Project Officer  
Sustainable Waste Management Team  
Garden Organic  
Ryton  
Coventry  
CV8 3LG

OR to

Peter Smithers  
School of Biomedical and Biological Sciences  
University of Plymouth  
Drake Circus  
Plymouth  
Devon PL4 8AA



Images courtesy of Susan Deakin



# Compost Heap Invertebrate Survey



Garden Organic & University of Plymouth

Name & Address

Email address

**Type of Input (please indicate the categories of waste that go into your compost heap and the approximate % that they make up of your weekly input)**

Kitchen waste	<input style="width: 150px; height: 20px;" type="text" value="%"/>
Hedge trimmings	<input style="width: 150px; height: 20px;" type="text" value="%"/>
Weeds & garden waste	<input style="width: 150px; height: 20px;" type="text" value="%"/>
Grass cuttings	<input style="width: 150px; height: 20px;" type="text" value="%"/>
Shredded paper	<input style="width: 150px; height: 20px;" type="text" value="%"/>
Other (Please indicate what)	<input style="width: 150px; height: 20px;" type="text" value="%"/>

**How often do you turn the heap?**

**Time since last turning**

**Usual time between turnings**

**Temperature, when the sample was taken (see instructions above)**

**Type of container (please circle)    Plastic   wooden    open heap**

**When did you start this compost heap.**

**Please note any larger animals that live in your heap( Hedgehogs, grass snakes etc).**

***Please ensure your 3 samples are clearly labelled Top, Mid or Bottom and if only one sample is sent in please indicate which level it came from.***