
Information sheet

Promoting home composting

This document provides guidance for local authorities wishing to promote home composting to their residents. Another method of diverting garden waste, grass cycling, is also covered.

It is broken up into five sections, in a similar way to activities on the Waste Prevention Toolkit: Likely diversion; Introduction to Behaviour Change; Home Composting Behaviour Change; Monitoring; and Setting Targets.

Likely diversion

Before embarking on any home composting activity, it is important to review whether it will have a significant impact. This section provides guidance on the likely diversion through home composting.

As a result of an extensive research programme conducted by WRAP it is now possible to make estimates of the diversion attributable to properly supported home composting schemes¹. A home composting bin can divert 150kg/hh/pa (this is an average figure, for more detailed information see the Behaviour change section on page 2).

The diversion figure is relevant only to home composting schemes which offer additional support to participants. WRAP therefore advises that the following minimum requirements are met:

- compost bins should have been distributed on an 'opt-in' rather than an 'opt-out' or total distribution basis;
- owners of the bins should be given instruction in how to make and use compost;
- owners should have access to support through local advisers, giving face-to-face advice where appropriate;
- a helpline or website should be made available to ensure availability of continuous support; and
- regular contact from the scheme should be provided so that composters can be encouraged to continue composting and to increase the range of materials that they compost. This will require a record of where compost bins have been provided to be maintained.

It is also essential that a record of the number of compost bins sold is kept in order to be able to establish the diversion factor. For each bin sold the purchaser should be asked whether or not they are already composting at home.

Assuming 30% of all households in an example authority of 100,000 households take up home composting this could divert an estimated 4,500 tonnes annually.²

¹ *Home Composting Diversion District Level Analysis and Home Composting Diversion Household Level Analysis* – see [Home composting landing page](#).

² *It is assumed all the households are home composting. The national average lapse rate (householders who bought a bin but are not using it) of 3.9% has already been applied.*

Activity	Likely kgs	Likely Impact	Tonnes Per Year	Avoided Costs @ £80 per tonne
Home composting	150kg/hh	30% hhs	4,500	360,000

The table above shows the estimated potential diversion for the example authority. You should work out the tonnage using the assumptions and apply them to your own data. You can use the ready reckoner to do this ([Home composting Calculator 2012](#)). You can also calculate, with your own data, the potential avoided disposal cost. To calculate the actual savings you will need to take account of the cost to carry out the activity as well. It is important to note that this potential tonnage diversion is sustained for a period of time, not indefinitely. You will need to ensure that you plan a scheme that encourages residents to continue home composting.

Introduction to behaviour change

Background

Once you have decided to promote home composting the next step is to “get to know” your audience, understand their issues, and how to target them effectively.

Delivering behaviour change

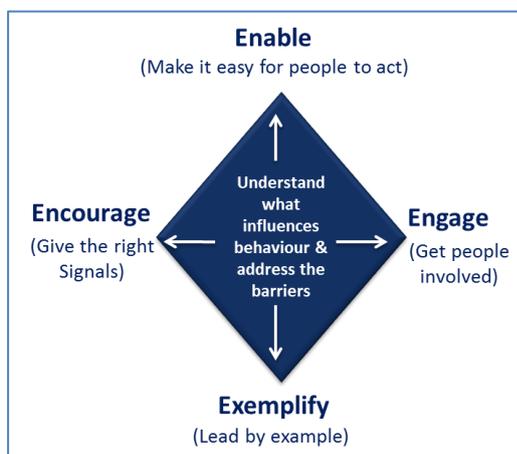
The research is indicating that there is a difference between encouraging recycling and the more complex behaviour change required for home composting. This research is also indicating that those interested in home composting are motivated by a different set of drivers to recycling and waste prevention behaviours.

How to deliver behaviour change

DEFRA has produced the 4Es framework (see diagram below) as a method to help planning for behaviour change. The framework is designed to ensure that all the factors which are necessary to change behaviour are present. This framework is used throughout this document to show you how it can be applied.

The framework was developed as part of the UK’s Sustainable Development Strategy – Securing the Future. This evidence-based strategy gives a strong lead to delivering sustainable behaviour change by engaging individuals, households and communities. It recognises the complexities that influence behaviour and the need for a consistent approach to change deep-seated habits.

The strategy defines a new approach that focuses on the need to enable, encourage and engage people towards sustainability (such as home composting) and recognises the need for those delivering the change to lead by example - exemplify.



The framework is also used in the Waste Prevention Toolkit. For more information on how to use the 4Es framework, view this [powerpoint presentation](#).

Behaviour change

Home Composting, Community Composting and Grass Cycling

In this section you will find out about what we mean by home composting, community composting and grass cycling, the issues, how to do these activities and the measurement of any changes.

Background

Almost one third of the waste sent to landfill in the UK could be transformed into compost and diverted from disposal. Compost has multiple uses including as a soil improver, mulch, plant feed or growing media.

Home composting is beneficial in that it enables householders to put organic matter back in to their soil without loss of natural habitat (such as through peat extraction) and to help gardens retain moisture.

Community composting can be used to complement home composting or replace it where home composting is not viable, for example in areas of flats or multi-occupancy houses with very limited or no garden space.

What is Home Composting?

The most popular home composting method for householders is the decomposition of biodegradable waste in an open-bottomed container.

Other methods include:

- The process of using worms in an enclosed container - wormeries.
- Digesters that allow decomposition of organic waste without producing compost at the end - such as a Green Cone.
- Probiotic pre-treatment encouraging fermentation by using micro-organisms in an anaerobic container - such as Bokashi bran.

Home compost bins can deal with softer garden waste, some paper/card and some food waste, e.g. fruit and vegetable peelings. Digesters, bokashi and wormeries deal solely with food waste.

There are no waste licensing issues if the householder is only composting their own garden or food waste.

What is Community Composting?

Organic materials are collected by a group, or delivered by residents and taken to be composted locally (e.g. on common or council-owned land such as allotments). It is generally carried out in open composting bays. However, small-scale In-Vessel Composting (IVC) units are used where food waste is included. Groups often buy or hire a shredder to allow heavier/woodier materials to be composted.

The advantages of community composting over larger-scale centralised composting are reduced environmental impacts and costs, and the social benefits to the community.

Community composting can also be used to complement;

- Garden waste collections - where these are chargeable householders can deliver to a local composting site usually for free.
- Household Waste Recycling Centres can generally only be used by car owners.

What is Grass Cycling?

Grass Cycling is leaving finely cut grass clippings on the lawn after mowing. This helps grass to naturally break down returning valuable nutrients and moisture to the soil. It also discourages weeds growing. According to research³ 1/2 acre of lawn can generate as much as 4 1/2 tons of grass cuttings a year – which can create nitrogen, potash and potassium – all great fertilising agents for grass.

Grass-cycling is undertaken either with a special mower (usually referred to as a 'mulching' or 'recycling' mower) or at a higher frequency than normal grass mowing as the clippings must be very short to allow for faster decomposition.

The UK has the perfect climatic conditions for grass-cycling, and as a nation of keen gardeners it could be used far more widely than is currently the case.

Enable - Understanding the barriers

This section is about understanding the barriers to home composting and grass cycling, how to overcome them and information provision. For information about community composting download this document: [Practical issues with community composting](#) .

Typical barriers for home composting include:

- Insufficient space real or perceived for a bin or wormery – for example for single person households and those with small gardens or limited space.
- Being put off by the cost of composters, wormeries etc.
- Lack of good quality information and support leading to confusion on what can be composted, how to do it, and how compost can be used.
- Having tried once and been dissatisfied with the results, e.g. putting too much grass in the compost bin.
- Being put off by perceived poor usability or design features of compost bins.
- Image (may not be "cool" for some demographics)

Typical barriers grass cycling include:

- Lack of time - perception that it takes too long to cut the grass using a grasscycling mower.
- Fear of lawn looking untidy or thatching.
- Expectation that grass cuttings will be walked into house.
- Being put off by the cost of a mulching mower.
- Unsure how to use the mower etc.

Enable - Home composting

You can offer practical support to overcome home composting barriers by providing a range of bins and support for householders.

³ www.mulching.co.uk

Master Composters

You can support householders by developing a Master Composter scheme. This can be run by County or District Councils, or by community organisations like BTCV or Wildlife Trusts. The scheme trains volunteers to become Master Composters. A Master Composter works within their own community to raise awareness of the benefits of home composting, encourage more people to compost at home and to support those already composting to ensure they are successful.

Anyone can train to be a Master Composter – no prior knowledge or experience is necessary. The range of ages and backgrounds of Master Composters mean that they can reach a wider audience than traditional compost promotions. A Master Composter's work can involve any of the following:

Giving tailored composting advice, talks and demonstrations to:

- Schools and Youth groups.
- Allotment groups and gardening clubs.
- Friends & Neighbours.
- Workplace training.
- Community events e.g. village fetes, fundraising events.

Writing articles for:

- Local press, e.g. promoting the benefits of home made compost.
- Gardening section of the local paper.
- Promotion of local sales of green waste compost.
- Newsletters for allotments or local resident groups.
- Church/Community/Parish publications.

Organising or participating in other promotions:

- Compost bins sales.
- Helping at council run roadshows.
- Designing promotional material.
- Contributing to websites.

For a local authority example of a Master Composter scheme, see the [Worcestershire](#) case study.

Enable - Overcoming barriers - Grass Cycling

For grass cycling you can offer practical support such as providing information on the different methods and equipment that can be used.

- Cylinder mower - if using a cylinder mower, householders need to understand that grass must be cut frequently.
- Mulching mowers - for effective lawn mulching a purpose built lawnmower is usually required. These produce very fine cuttings which don't clump together. They don't have to be used as frequently as regular cylinder mowers. Mulching mowers retail for between £150-£900 depending on the make, style (push or powered, rotary or cylinder, electric or petrol) and power. Manufacturers include Toro, Honda, Mountfield and Stiga.

Special 'mulching' lawn mowers can be bought while some lawn mowers can be retrofitted with appropriate blades. Mulching mowers differ only in the blade use, so in some cases it is only necessary to buy a new blade costing around £20.

More information can be found at

- Mulching Magic - A handy online guide to lawn mulching. Sponsored by two major mulching mower manufacturers www.mulching.co.uk
- Mowers Online - Sell a number of mulching mowers across a wide price range www.mowers-online.co.uk
- MowerPro - Online search engine for lawnmower dealers and suppliers www.mowerpro.co.uk

Mulching mowers can also be bought from most high street retailers e.g. B&Q / Garden machinery stores etc.

Enable - Providing information

Advice on home composting can be provided through:

- A leaflet delivered with the bin on how to get started.
- Seasonal newsletters or eZines that provide additional motivation and hints and tips.
- A website and telephone helpline (manned by paid experts) for people who have questions.
- Information signs at Household Waste sites especially near the garden waste collection areas.
- Directing residents to the [Recycle Now](#) website

Advice to householders on how to grass cycle should include:

- Ensure you never cut more than one-third off the top of the grass in one mowing session.
- Mow regularly and when the grass is dry.
- Keep your lawnmower blade sharp.
- Mow over clippings a second time if they are too long – this will shred them down even further.
- Keep grass at around 2" in spring, 3-4" over the summer and lower to 2" by autumn.

Enable - Planning

In order to put a plan in place you need to think about the following;

- How is your current home composting scheme performing? What types of organics are still in the residual waste? Do you need to focus on certain materials?
- Are there any barriers or restrictions to stop householders participating? How many properties have gardens? How many households could compost but do not have space for a standard compost bin?
- What are the main barriers in your area and how can you overcome them? What is the geographical spread of compost bin sales? Are there areas of low sales?

Encourage – Give the right signals

This section provides information about understanding the benefits and providing incentives.

There can be a number of benefits to home composting and grass cycling. The main ones are:

- Cost savings through reducing the need to buy expensive mulch, growing media, soil improvers and fertilisers.
- Reduced use of peat-based composts, which are responsible for damage to, and depletion of, ancient peat bogs that act as important habitats in several parts of the UK.
- Time savings, due to fewer trips to the Household Waste Recycling Centre.
- A naturally fed lawn is healthier and greener than those reliant on artificial chemical pesticides and fertilisers; mulching can also prevent lawn thatch.
- Time saving - up to 30% of time can be saved by leaving grass clippings on the lawn.

Encourage - Incentives

- How much to charge for composting bins will depend on bin purchase and delivery costs and the level of funding you have.
- It is better to charge for the bins than to give them away. Experience has shown that some people give up easily because they have made no financial commitment. It is also difficult to revert to charging once the 'free bin' precedent has been established.

- For mowers, vouchers or hire options could be considered.

Engage – Home composting

In order to get people involved you need to understand your target audience, work with stakeholders and or other national gardening organisations.

Remember that your target audience may not just involve those with gardens (i.e. with grass or flower beds). There are a range of compost bins, digesters and wormeries to suit properties with large and small gardens, flats with balconies and houses with small open spaces.

Recent research has indicated that gardening is no longer the top motivation for people to start home composting. New recruits to home composting are now more likely to claim that they took it up because of a concern for the environment - largely to stop some of their waste going to landfill or reduce their waste. Messaging may be more effective if bearing this in mind.

There are a number of myths surrounding home composting which may be challenged with a little gentle persuasion. It is worth targeting households with gardens who have not tried composting before and are unsure of whether it is for them but are not outwardly against it. Some of the misconceptions around home composting (captured in comments from surveys by WRAP) include:

- I don't have a big enough garden.
- I don't produce enough to put in a compost bin to make it worthwhile.
- It's better to put it out for the council to take away isn't it?
- The council make money out of my garden waste so I'd rather give it to them.
- Wouldn't know where to start and home composting is only for expert or really keen gardeners.
- Have tried it but are disappointed or having difficulties with it.

Initially your target audience needs to be motivated by being made aware of: "What's in it for me?"

- The personal benefits such as the reduced need for compost, fertilisers etc and helping to improve their garden;
- The operational aspects, i.e. how easy it is to do it properly and that it's cheap; and
- Wider environmental benefits.

Engage - Grass cycling

Your audience will be those households with a lawn so try targeting people who deliver grass cuttings to household waste sites.

Ideas for engaging households are:

- Setting up a service to cut people's lawns with mulching lawnmowers as a community waste prevention project or a local hire scheme.
- Working with local retailers to provide point of sale information on mulching lawn mowers and associated products to demonstrate the benefits and practicalities of grass-cycling.
- Providing tailored advice on how to grass-cycle effectively and avoid lawn thatching and walking grass into the house, i.e. via Master Composter scheme.
- Working in partnership with local businesses and local stakeholders such as community compost groups and other voluntary organisations, e.g. U3A (University of the 3rd Age) and keen gardeners.

Engage - Working with partners

There are a number of organisations that could be involved with local home composting/grass cycling initiatives. These include:

- Resident associations.
- Other Local Authorities.

- Composting bin/mowers manufacturers and suppliers.
- [Association of Organics Recycling](#).
- [Garden Organic](#)
- [Community Composting Network](#)
- [The Conservation Volunteers](#) (formerly BTCV).
- [U3A](#) (University of the 3rd Age).
- [Wildlife Trusts](#) - campaigners for peat-free compost.
- [Changeworks](#)

Engage - Planning a campaign

You will need to consider:

- Who are your target audiences? What campaign materials can I use? e.g. WRAP campaign materials.
- Where are they? Where do they live/work/shop?
- What stakeholders do you need to involve to help you?
- What are the main benefits to your target audience?
- Do you have all the information you need to understand the benefits and barriers. If not what do you need to do? E.g. carry out a survey

Exemplify - Local government takes the lead

- You can ensure that where ever feasible home composting takes place at council buildings and those of contractors and promote the fact that the council composts. This could include offices, depots, libraries and schools. This may involve setting up a system to collect compostable materials from inside the buildings. Promote the fact that the council composts its own waste.
- Promote the fact that most councils grass cycle in all grassy public areas and let residents know that this is normal practice for the council.
- Include grass cycling for parks, highways and schools maintenance in specifications for council contracts.

Monitoring

There are a number of options for monitoring:

Home Composting

- The number of households that buy bins should be recorded.
- A diversion figure of 150kg/hh/pa⁴ can be applied to the number of households but a lapse rate should be taken into account first. At present the annual lapse rate for the WRAP supported home composting scheme is 3.9%. This means that if 1,000 households have bought bins in a year you would use 961 households to calculate the tonnage diversion. When you are calculating tonnage diversion for the following year you would need to apply the lapse rate to the 961 households figure. A scheme should, where possible, regularly review lapse rates among home composters from the scheme, this can be done through a questionnaire survey⁵.
- If you don't have bin sale information or you want to include households that have purchased bins from other sources or built their own bins then you should carry out a survey. The survey would provide you with the percentage of households who compost which you can then apply to the total number of households in your area. Once you have this figure you can apply the diversion rate only if home composting is fully supported in your area i.e. you have an on-going campaign and/or Master Composters in place.

To avoid double-counting, if you are using a survey to work out participation, then you should not include the number of households that have bought bins from council associated sales when you are working out diversion.

⁴ *Home Composting Diversion District Level Analysis and Home Composting Diversion Household Level Analysis* – see [Home composting landing page](#).

⁵ For information on surveying, see Chapter 4 of WRAP's [monitoring and evaluation guidance](#)

Grass Cycling

As there are only a few grass cycling projects running in the UK the potential diversion is difficult to assess. If you are running a project monitoring could include:

- Asking residents to record how many times they cut the lawn.
- Ask residents how large their lawn is – WRAP has estimated that the average lawn produces 2-4 kg/m² grass per year. Using the size of the lawn and the number of times cut estimate a potential diversion.

Setting Targets

If you have decided to carry out a home composting or grass cycling campaign or improve your existing one you will need to set a target. Remember you will need to be able to monitor the target you set.

Some examples are shown below;

- Sell 1,000 bins in year X.
- Increase sales by 10% in year X.
- To divert 2,000 tonnes of waste through selling around 13,000 bins by year X.

In addition you may want to set targets around recruitment of master composters.

If you have decided to carry out a grass cycling campaign some examples are;

- Sell 100 mulching lawn mowers in year X.
- Increase sales by 10% in year X.
- To divert 500 tonnes of garden waste in year X.

While we have tried to make sure this information sheet is accurate, we cannot accept responsibility or be held legally responsible for any loss or damage arising out of or in connection with this information being inaccurate, incomplete or misleading. This material is copyrighted. You can copy it free of charge as long as the material is accurate and not used in a misleading context. You must identify the source of the material and acknowledge our copyright. You must not use material to endorse or suggest we have endorsed a commercial product or service. For more details please see our terms and conditions on our website at www.wrap.org.uk

**Waste & Resources
Action Programme**

The Old Academy
21 Horse Fair
Banbury, Oxon
OX16 0AH

Tel: 01295 819 900
Fax: 01295 819 911
E-mail: info@wrap.org.uk

Helpline freephone
0800 100 2040

www.wrap.org.uk/content/home-composting-guidance-and-information

Printed on xx% recycled
content paper

