



newsletter

Issue 12, March 2008

Welcome to the twelfth edition of the Manx Organic Network newsletter, which this time focuses on some of our growers and producers around the Island.

Thinking positive By Janet Bridle

PEAK OIL, climate change, rising food costs, rocketing fuel and fertiliser prices – it's all there in the news every day. Outside the clouds since Christmas have hung dark and heavy, the wind has been blowing and everywhere is mud, mud, mud. It has not been exactly uplifting.

I could take this opportunity to remind you about how organic farming and food production could be part of the solution and encourage you to continue to support our Manx organic farmers and growers...but you know all that anyway, so I won't.

Instead, let's think about more uplifting things. The sun has finally come out, there is a purifying frost on the ground, its time to get out again. What about spending an hour or so browsing around one of our farmers' markets – sampling Nad's delicious fresh soups at the Green Mann; seeing my children's delight when I bring back from my trip another batch of Liz Devereau's amazingly moist chocolate intense muffins.

Let's talk about the fact that more people are calling us for advice on starting up organic vegetable patches in their children's primary schools. Or that Jenny and Stephen Devereau's eggs are well on the way to conversion to organic status (and deliciously nutritious in the meantime too). These people and all the others who support the Island's markets are making our lives so much richer and fuller. Now that is uplifting.

And let me tell you about something else really amazing –

Transition Isle of Man. What's that? It's a community initiative that's just getting going in the Island: part of the Transition Towns movement currently sweeping the UK. This was set up to give communities of all sizes a framework for combating peak oil and climate change. The idea is that the whole community works together to become more self-reliant, from finding alternative energy sources to boosting local food production.



At the moment Transition Isle of Man is being driven forward by a group of people from all walks of life, who got together after learning about the challenges of imminent fossil fuel depletion and the implications for our

everyday lives. They are not an official group and their only purpose is to get more people involved.

If you'd like to be part of it, or just want to find out more, call Janet Pilbeam on 823253 or Alice Quayle on 307842, or email transitioniom@mac.com. For more information on peak oil and Transition Towns, visit www.powerswitch.org.uk and www.transitiontowns.org. If you don't have your own Internet access, pop along to your local library and look it up there, the staff will be happy to guide you.



The Transition Isle of Man stand situated next to the MON stand at the recent Energy Expo in Douglas

CERTIFIED ORGANIC (and guaranteed delicious) BEEF AND LAMB

from Manx farmers

Andrew Moore and Pheric Curphey

Available at:

Radcliffe Butchers, Castletown – 822271

Fenton Campbell, Duke Street, Douglas – 629381

Kermeens butchers in Port Erin and Onchan

Shoprite, Ramsey – 818722

Farmers' market, Villa Marina, first Saturday in the month

I READ IN THE Independent (30 January, page 17) the other week something which made my blood boil, so goodness knows how it makes farmers feel. Here is an extract from the piece, entitled ‘Low prices force farmers to give up on cauliflowers’:

‘Growers of the vegetable in the UK say it is no longer a viable crop. Farmers receive 18p per cauliflower when each head costs up to 35p to produce and many look set to abandon it altogether. Charlie Hicks, a greengrocery chain owner, said that the problem lay in the control that supermarkets wield over price, “Supermarkets have an absurd amount of power. They push prices down and something’s got to give.”’

Supermarkets killing off British cauliflowers

What a tragedy it would be if cauliflowers disappeared because of the supermarkets. Andrew Moore, certified organic farmer of Balladoole Farm, has been growing beautiful cauliflowers for some years now and sells them at the various markets around the island, as well as through Robinsons/Shoprite when he has a surplus. I thought I would do a little digging, so to speak, into what growing cauliflowers entails.

Andrew grows from seed. He plants two varieties at the end of April, one of which is ready in August, the other in February.

“The stubble field from the previous years’ wheat crop is ploughed, levelled and dunged, rotivated, ridged and then



The end of the cauliflower?

By Janet Bridle

precision sown at twelve-inch intervals,” explains Andrew. “All that costs money, time, and fuel, plus battling with the weather. If the soil is too wet you can’t sow because the soil sticks to the drill. Once they are up three inches high they are scarified and then hoed by hand in between the plants. When grown and ready, they are hand picked – even the big automated guys hand-pick – graded, packed and taken to the market. And hopefully sold.”

Fantastic taste, fabulous value – and local organic too!

Andrew sells his caulis from 50p for a small one to £1.50 for the really big ones – the ones that could give you a week’s worth of cauliflower cheese (in the supermarkets I’ve seen organic caulis from Holland priced at £1.89, regardless of size).

I asked Andrew which varieties he grows. He looked at me and smiled. “I’m not telling you that. It’s taken me 20 years to find the best varieties

that suit my soil, the climate and give good continuity of supply. It’s a trade secret.” Fair enough.

A super food in every way

Admittedly, as a child I was not over keen on cauliflower, but I’ve since grown to love its nutty, smooth slightly peppery flavour. So I was delighted to learn recently that the cauliflower is a highly nutritious vegetable on a par with broccoli and curly kale. When I entered ‘health benefits of cauliflower’ as an Internet search, I found the following:

‘Cauliflower lacks the green chlorophyll found in other members of the cruciferous family of vegetables like broccoli, cabbage and kale, because the leaves of the plant shield the florets from the sun as they grow. Cauliflower and other cruciferous vegetables... contain compounds that may help prevent cancer. These compounds appear to stop enzymes from activating cancer-causing agents in the body, and they increase the activity of enzymes that disable and eliminate carcinogens.’

So pick up a cauliflower next time you see Andrew and think how lucky we are to have such a fresh, nutritious, quality organic product available on our doorstep. Long may the cauli continue.

The first person to email me the definition of ‘scarified’ gets a free cauli from Andrew – jbridle@manx.net

The amateur veg patch **By Janet Bridle**

MY POOR, NEGLECTED vegetable patch. I had such high hopes for you. I enthusiastically dug you over, lovingly raked you to a fine cover, eagerly pored over seed catalogues for the right variations, expertly divided you up into sections, sowed you with an optimistic hand.

Then I stood back, watched, watered and impatiently waited...but you let me down. And oh, so publicly. The shame of it! I stand peering down at you now, frustration and disappointment bubbling just under the surface. As the dark clouds billow menacingly above and the damp Manx chill starts to seep in, I turn my

back on you. Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned.

But as I enter my poly tunnel, my eyes light up. Life is brimming in here. Two rows of fish boxes filled with my own compost support thriving winter leaves, kindly supplied as seedlings by poly tunnel veteran Ian Davies. I am a different woman in here. I am a Grower. As I potter about (there’s really nothing to do – they hardly even need watering), my spirits begin to rise...

I will try again. I will not give up at the first fall. I am better than that. I’ll do things differently this year: I’ve had a good dose of gardening expertise

from Jimmy, I have my own wonderful compost, and Jeremy has pledged to build raised beds so I can maintain my soil fertility more precisely.

I walk back to the patch. Can we start again, you and I? I know we can make it work. I will treat you better. I’ll stick with you through thick and thin. I will raise you up to new heights (literally, if Jeremy sticks to his word).

The sun peeps briefly through a small gap in the clouds. All is well between vegetable patch and fledgling grower. Now where’s that catalogue and what did I read somewhere about bio-dynamics?...

Manx Marvel tomato performance – the 2007 results

By Ian Davies

DO YOU EVER get that feeling that people are talking about a different subject when you know they are referring to the same one? Well that's how I feel about Manx Marvel. A number of people – including me – were frankly not impressed; others were. Surprise, surprise – it all seems to depend on taste.

Everyone I have spoken to said germination was good, the plants were strong, the cropping was early and heavy, and the fruit stayed well on the plants. That's the good news. The bad news for most was that the flavour was poor, the internal texture somewhat mushy and the skin a bit tough – good for a cooking tomato, but not for salads. It seems that this particularly applied to the people who like an acid-sweet tomato for salads. Generally, they won't

be growing Manx Marvel again.

There were a few important exceptions. Mrs Rita Kinrade of Port Erin was very impressed, but talking to her on the phone, she seems to have a few secret potions that would frankly make a silk purse out of a sow's ear – if you can apply that metaphor to tomatoes!

Bill Mizen from Port St Mary was also generally impressed and has already germinated some for friends who were not able to get hold of seed last year. Maybe the climate is more favourable down there in the south-west?

So the Manx Marvel will continue on into another season at least. For those who still want to try some, I have a few seeds left from my original supply. Please send a SAE to me, Ian Davies, Boayl Chirrym, Ballacottier, Andreas,

IM7 4BB and I will aim to send you some while supplies last.

In the meantime, I will pass on the results of our unofficial survey to Dr Russell Sharp, the plant scientist at the Department of Sustainable Agriculture at Lancaster University Environment Centre who sent us the original supplies.



*Log onto the MON website
for the latest news
www.manxorganicnetwork.com*

Farmers' market news from the north

By Liz Gubby

AS OWNERS OF the One Stop Shop in Ballaugh village, we have been regular contributors to both the Green Man and Ramsey markets, and are founder members of the farmers' market committee.

Fresh, local, seasonal produce ...

The Manx Market is the most recent addition to the Isle of Man's popular and successful farmers' market scene. Our philosophy is to promote Manx produce and sell it at a fair price. We firmly believe in growing and selling fresh, local, seasonal, produce without the use of chemicals, so as to keep our carbon footprint in check. We're keen

to encourage like-minded growers by spreading the word that growing naturally produces better tasting crops, is sustainable and environmentally friendly.

... from onions to apples

On the fruit and veg front, cauliflowers, cabbages, mushrooms, marrows, onions, tomatoes, beetroot, parsnips, pumpkins, apples and wonderful, wonderful carrots are all currently available.

... Manx beef to biltong

Manx Aberdeen Angus beef and Loaghtan lamb are also on offer, along with a range of sausages (some smoked), kipper paté, meat pies, fruit pies, and South African specialities like biltong, boerewors and droewors. Being part of a local shoot, we can supply wild seasonal game (partridge, duck, pheasant, rabbit, and hare), patés and smoked products – both at the One Stop Shop and the Island's farmers' markets.

... honey to herbs

Honey, jams, wild jellies, eggs (hen and turkey), organic bread, Welsh cakes, gluten free cakes and quiches and much, much more are all on sale. Herbal salts, herb oils and fresh herb plants can be bought, along with pot plants and seasonal offerings such as hanging baskets, winter pansies and Spanish Eyes lavender – which the bees love.

... and lots of local craft

Craft on sale includes wood turning, basket weaving, lace demonstrations and card making. Manx 'Time Held' memorabilia, Manx dolls, Manx teddies, jewellery, cross stitch and personalised tee shirts are all available – showing just how much craft there is on the Island.

If you'd like to be a stallholder at the Manx Market, please ring Liz or Cassandra on 897222.

Organic conversion on the Carnane Estate By Adam Kelly

WHEN I FIRST TOOK over managing the farm in early February 2007 I had mixed feelings about organic farming. The fields that were suitable for crop production were contract farmed. Crops were milling wheat for Laxey mill and feed wheat and barley for sale to livestock producers. The crops were grown to maximise yields and returns. The permanent pasture fields and rough grazing areas were rented to a sheep farmer who farmed to conventional standards.

Having previously only been involved in 'modern' farming techniques, organic seemed 'hocus pocus'. But that has all changed now. The policy is to farm the whole farm organically under Soil Association standards. We will soon be going into the second year of conversion, which will see the farm managed along traditional lines with suckler cows, and a Loaghtan and Blackface flock. The fields that can be ploughed will have different crops grown in rotation.

Calves and lambs will be kept on farm for finishing for meat or as replacements.

Crops including straw will all be used on the farm, although we intend to grow some milling wheat for the production of organic flour once organic conversion is completed in 2009.

We have had problems, some of which initially seemed impossible to solve. But so far we have managed to overcome them all. Any future hurdles will be met with a much better understanding of both organic farming methods and the rules and regulations involved in becoming organically certified.

Cropping

We weren't sure if we would be able to grow crops in sufficient quantity without using artificial fertilisers and

chemical sprays. As the clay content of our soil is relatively high, we are restricted in which sources of potash and phosphate we may use. Artificial



chemical nitrogen is not permitted, so we concentrate on building natural nitrogen levels in a few different ways.

With careful management of home-produced farmyard manure, we use as much of the nitrogen that the stock produce while housed as possible. At the end of last year we sowed a green manure cover on one of the fields which is a nitrogen lifter and a nitrogen fixer.



This will be ploughed in for this year's barley crop. It will be interesting to see the results, as this method will help to make up the nitrogen shortfall of a lack of manure.

We haven't had many problems with crop disease, but I think this is something you have to learn not to worry about and accept the yield you get. We're hoping that a long rotation on the arable fields will reduce disease build-up, increase nitrogen levels and

improve soil structure. Soil structure will be particularly important over the next few years, as these fields have historically been sprayed and sown heavily, without getting any manure or green crop to maintain the soil structure.

Weed control

We use a spring tined harrow some time after drilling to pull any weeds out. It seems a bit harsh, as the field is completely brown when finished, but as long as the seed has been drilled deep enough and the machine is set correctly, the crop soon recovers.

Livestock

This side of things is much more difficult to manage. Having relied on so many medicines and practices for years, we have had to go back to the drawing board with animal health and management plans.

The flock of sheep we inherited was largely made up of old dears who we decided to lamb to gain at least some return. In hindsight and from an organic conversion point of view, this was a huge mistake. It would have been much easier to start with a young flock of sheep which had been bred on the farm and whose health history we knew. With the large number of sheep on the farm, traditional low density and rotational grazing, and restricted use of conventional anthelmintics to control worm burdens, it was all very difficult.

We are now breeding up a new flock of sheep, keeping in mind natural resistance to both worms and disease. We did try a homeopathic remedy for worms last year. This had mixed results but was promising overall. We recently purchased a fecal egg counting kit which will enable us to closely monitor counts this year. If ewes have high egg counts pre-lambing, we will worm them with a

conventional wormer, removing the need to worm lambs which will eventually be marketed for meat.

Fly strike was a significant problem last year, but better worm management will help. As we are not allowed to dip we used a pour-on, but the product we're



permitted to use proved unsatisfactory. If our animals' welfare is under threat we will need to apply for a restricted practices permission to use a better product.

Mineral analyses of grass, silage and crops consistently showed very low levels of essential minerals. These were remedied last year with organically approved feed blocks. The rules have changed this year, so we have to buy 100% organic feeds. These are extremely expensive and we're currently looking into cheaper options.

The next hurdle to jump was compulsory scab treatment. As dipping, which we can't do, is the most effective way of controlling scab, we have to give jabs. This results in a meat withdrawal period of 140 days, which makes things difficult to manage to say the least! On the plus side, the jabs are also wormers, which helps get the sheep into tip-top condition pre-tupping.

Because of late lambing last year and the lack of facilities to finish lambs indoors, we still have several stragglers. These are on a mix of traditional turnips, swedes and kale, which yielded surprisingly well considering the lack of inputs. Once eaten off and ploughed in, they will help the soil structure and fertility for this year's crop of oats.

Cereals and animal feeds

Conventional concentrates are

expensive enough, and organic sources of protein command a premium. Previous attempts have proved that the farm isn't suited to growing conventional high protein crops, so we are trying two different crops this year.

One is a barley/pea mix which will be combined and milled, the other a barley/forage pea mix which will be baled as arable silage. Obviously organic seed for these crops also comes at a premium. We plan to grow everything we need except minerals, which will have to be bought in.

Biodiversity

Wildlife on the farm seems to be on the increase. We've had frequent visits from an owl, and a peacock and peahen have made themselves at home

– although no young have been seen. I wish I could name the rest of the birds; maybe I should learn about them so I know what I'm looking at!

It has been a year of ups and downs, but overall I'm very positive about the future of organic farming. I am also sure that more will jump in, especially with the rising costs of fertilisers and the increasing demand for organic produce.

With the much higher costs of feeds and seeds, the incredible amount of paper work involved and the reduced production per acre, organic produce must be priced at a premium to reward the farmer for his efforts, to encourage more farmers to follow suit, and to protect both wildlife and the lovely Island we live in.

The professional veg patch: certified or certifiable? By Dot Price, Purely Plants

After being led up the garden path by Robin for years, I'm being taken in a completely new direction for 2008. We are going Certified Organic with our veg and free range eggs!

It all started with a talk at the Glen Helen Hotel by Lancashire-based organic grower Alan Schofield, whose company Growing with Nature runs a very successful organic box scheme and sells direct at farmers' markets.

Alan is passionate about organics and willingly gives his time and expertise to help like-minded people. We've attended several of his workshops and gleaned a wealth of information about seed merchants, sowing, continuity planting, crops and yield. He has also visited our veg patch and given us lots of useful tips (hence Robin's Christmas present: a 'Flame Weeder Gun'!)

As many MON members will know, we already sell naturally grown produce at the Ramsey and Green Mann markets,

so organic certification is a natural progression. It means extra expense and paperwork – the application forms alone are many – but Andy McDonald of DAFF's Organic Advisory Service is a great support. We've also had a lot of encouragement from Andrew Moore and Jimmy Lawton.

Like Alan Schofield, we are passionate about fresh local food, naturally produced with respect to animals and the environment; putting back into the land what is taken out. Organic production supports our local economy, cuts food miles and lets people connect directly with their producers and growers.

If we can inspire any customers, farmers or producers to follow our example, we'll have achieved something. Our journey is just beginning. With our application to Organic Farmers & Growers (OF&G) now posted, the next step is an inspection. Watch this space!

A diary of dairying dilemmas

By Sue Sanders, Ballalough Farm, West Baldwin

December 2007

It's the time of year when life on a dairy farm is rather mundane. Hours and hours of carrying food around, then pushing the resultant residues away. It's a never ending cycle, and still the cows have to be milked – even on Christmas day!

The cows are very comfortable in their deep sand beds (no straw because organic crops failed to produce enough!) It has its benefits though, as sand doesn't harbour dangerous bugs – and stops cows slipping on the concrete. The drawback is the huge bill for the 30 tonnes a week we're using!

We seem to have quite a bit of grass growing on the farm - perhaps it's all the nitrogen from the clover keeping it going. A peppering of white woolly intruders have taken advantage of our empty fields; as they say, 'the other man's grass is always greener'! Must get on the phone.

If we don't have too much cold weather, we should get an early turnout.

Experimenting for the first time with keeping some of our animals out over winter by feeding them on kale grown specially, plus some silage in ring feeders. Basically it's very costly making silage and carting farmyard manure. We're testing this system as it was used successfully in the 50s and 60s, but whether it will still work today remains to be seen. Looks like a good idea so far, if you don't mind hairy cows!

January 2008

New Year's Day...heifer calf born! Our new year letter is 'L', so I have to scan the baby name sites, dictionaries and such all year for inspiration. L1 Sandisfarne Livia Ruby has arrived in the herd. Managed to convince our family of Slovaks to do morning and afternoon milking for double rates on, then Sid, our Muslim vet student, to do the night with Andrew scraping s***. Andrew always gets the rubbish jobs!

Have daffodils out in flower in the paddock. This sight should feel like a

harbinger of Spring, but it feels more like a portent of global warming.

Discovered from Bryn, our trusty salesman from Isle of Man Farmers, that the price of fertilisers had gone up 100% since we stopped buying it, which brought a very smug organic smile to Andrew's face. Is this the beginning of peak oil? Since our youngest son got him the book 'The Last Oil Shock' for Christmas, and following a very interesting meeting we went to at St Johns, peak oil is Andrew's latest hobby horse. He has become a veritable Prophet of Doom, reciting



facts and figures to eye rolling and sighs from the rest of us...

Only had one quick run around outside in the middle of the night last week – in nightie and wellies – as high yielders had made a dash for freedom through a sliding door that an enterprising cow had licked open. Took me back to when we lived in Wales, re-sheeting a silage clamp on Boxing Day after some nymphomaniac cow brought down a series of gates chasing her herd mates around. They all ran up the clamp and danced around. We didn't.

Oh to be in a job where one can shut

the door and forget about things for a while. We're lucky if we can put two hours of emptiness together! Received just before Christmas, the 'Organic Farming Scheme 2004' forms from DAFF still lie on the work surface – needing attention if we're going to commit totally...

I'd better explain. It all began when we were propositioned by our Advisor from across, who deals with lots of farming businesses, including organic ones. We'd discussed several times with him our depressed milk price of around 19–20p per litre during 2006 and how to get more.

Escalating fertiliser costs were a major headache and Andrew had always maintained that someone had to take the plunge and produce organic milk, as life here in the dairying sector would be a thankless task if supermarkets broke the 'derogation' bringing such milk in – and perhaps a move back to restrictive dairying across might be on the cards, as milk quota was no longer of value (the thing that brought us here).

We did some research, visited a few commercial dairying farms and the rest is history... now well into conversion! But in the last few months we've been treading water and trying to understand what is going on. After years of low prices, milk has suddenly shot

to heady heights, with the Creamery paying us 26p a litre! This has put us in a quandary, because organic premiums haven't risen to match it.

We hope the organic wholesalers like OMSCO improve their milk price to encourage people to carry on. At the moment, some people in conversion are stopping, while others in the UK are continuing to keep the land organic, but farm conventionally, giving them the option to return to organic in six months if prices improve.

Gosh, just seen the time - must go and throw something on the table...

To fluoridate or not to fluoridate? Tell us what you think.

Dear MON members

Your committee have thought long and hard about the issue of fluoridation, and some of us have been to the various meetings and ‘debates’ attended by both the Department of Health and the Save our Water campaign organisers.

As a committee we’d like to support Save our Water, but we will only do so publicly if the majority of the responses we get from this article are in agreement.

Our sentiments are probably best expressed by organic livestock farmer Pheric Curphey from Kirk Michael: “Another unnecessary chemical in our already over-polluted,

The pro-fluoridation argument

The state of oral health among our young children on the Isle of Man is poor – on average they experience more caries than their counterparts in the UK, and from a Public Health perspective we are looking at effective ways of tackling this big public health problem. Caries can lead to pain, infection, nutrition and cosmetic problems and they are the major cause of our local young children being exposed to the risks of general anaesthetic. We have studied the available evidence and we believe that fluoridation of our water would help alleviate the situation in a safe and effective manner.

Water fluoridation does not in any way contribute to pollution. The chemicals used for water fluoridation are specifically manufactured to order and to exacting quality standards which must comply with Defra (UK) and EU specifications. The east of England, including Kent, often has natural levels of fluoride that are at or near the optimum level for dental health and this is reflected in the better oral health in this region.

Water fluoridation does not contravene the European Convention on Human Rights and consuming fluoride-free water is not a human right. Medicine regulatory bodies in the UK and EU do not recognise fluoridation of water as medication for regulatory purposes. We look on water fluoridation as supplementation with a beneficial impact on public health.

Dr Paul Emerson *Consultant in Public Health Medicine, Public Health Directorate, DHSS*

chemical-ridden food chain.”

Does the Isle of Man Government want to be known as a Government that enabled its people to make healthy changes to their lives, or just plumped for more chemicals? Could this turn out to be the biggest public health scandal since billions were spent getting us off not-terribly-good-for-you saturated fats and onto seriously harmful trans fats?

We have set out below the two arguments, together with a cut-off slip. Please fill in and return this by 15 March to: The Membership Secretary, 6 Bowling Green Road, Castletown IM9 – or email jbridle@manx.net

The anti-fluoridation argument

In February 2007, Isle of Man Health Minister Eddie Teare announced that there would be a 12-month public consultation on the issue of water fluoridation. The Isle of Man Campaign for non-Fluoridated Tap Water has since been campaigning vigorously against this proposal.

In addition to the proven condition of dental fluorosis (mottling of the teeth), new evidence of other harm is constantly emerging, including a fluoridation/bone cancer link. Fluoridation also seeks to override our human rights in that every person has a right to refuse medication.

The UK Soil Association opposes fluoridation on the grounds that it is a prophylactic treatment, though they concede that the water is still considered potable, so organic status would not be affected if it were implemented.

Many people strive to keep their homes, bodies and personal environment as free from pollution as possible. If fluoridation were to go ahead it would be very hard to avoid the toxic waste fluorides, as water is used for most human functions.

We urge everyone, parents and non-parents, to read our campaign leaflets and visit our website to read the arguments for and against adding fluoride to our water supply – www.saveourwater.tripod.com

Please fill in and return this by 15 March to: The Membership Secretary, 6 Bowling Green Road, Castletown IM9 – or email jbridle@manx.net

The Isle of Man Campaign for non-Fluoridated Tap Water

I am for fluoridation

I am against fluoridation

Additional comments

Signed

Print name

Address

Tel/email

Home-made compost – simply the best

By Sue Mitchell, South Bucks Soil Association group

HAVING MADE compost for 33 years, I see it as part of my life. I can't imagine not making it. I usually give talks on the subject, taking along my demonstration bin, diagrams, and samples of the compost from start to finish. This is the first article I have ever written, so I hope I can get the message across!

From waste to wonder-stuff

Composting is really easy and you'll get good results if you follow the rules. My 'speciality' is worm compost. The brandlings (AKA red manure worms) turn your kitchen waste into wonderful, sweet-smelling compost in about six weeks in summertime, 12 in winter. You must only use kitchen waste – fruit and veg peelings, tea bags, coffee grounds, egg shells, pieces of kitchen roll etc – for this method. Make sure you keep everything moist – not too wet, not too dry.

All other waste – grass mowings, leaves, prunings, etc – must be kept separate, as they take a lot longer to rot down. This mix can be used as a mulch to keep your soil moist in summer and warm in winter. It will also keep the weeds down. If you want to make this type of compost, you'll need something like a wooden 'New Zealand' bin with two compartments, or some structure to contain the compost. You will also need to build this up in layers: one layer of 'greens' (eg, lawn mowings), one layer of 'browns' (eg, leaves, prunings).

Back to the worm compost then. For starters, you'll need at least two bins. When the first one is full, you can start on the second. By the time this one is full, the first should be ready to use on the garden – and so on.

Keeping your worm house in order

I tell primary school children to think of the compost bin as the worms' house. You just need to keep them warm in their house, give them plenty of food (your kitchen waste) and some bedding (well rotted leaf mould, sieved mulch or shredded paper – or they seem to

love well-rotted horse manure if you can get it!) If you do all this for them, they'll do all the work for you and turn your waste into fabulous compost. Even better, it won't end up in the dreaded landfill!

It's all in the layering

Most importantly, everything has to be built up in layers. Our council provides bottomless bins that stand directly on the soil. If you have to use bins with a base, you'll need to put sand and gravel in the bottom as drainage, and drill some holes in the bin for seepage – as well as air holes in the lid. Here's how to build up the layers:

- Layer 1: your choice of bedding for the worms, about 3ins thick. Add a handful of brandling worms – these are red in colour and smaller than earthworms (and incidentally, they can live to be 15 years old!)
- Layer 2: your well-mixed kitchen waste. Mix in some calcified seaweed too if you like; this puts back the minerals and trace elements into the soil. The resulting compost will be extra rich and slow-release, so a little will go a long way.
- Layer 3: another layer of bedding, to keep down any unpleasant smells.
- Layer 4 (optional): I put old cotton shirts and wool jumpers on top to keep the worms warm. If you do this they'll keep on working just as hard for you in winter as in summer. They will eat the old clothes too, as long as they're made from natural fibres. Just lift this layer off when you add kitchen waste to the bin and put it back after adding the bedding layer.

Keep on building up like this until the bin is full. You may notice little yellow balls and tiny, white, thread-like things in the compost. These are the worm cocoons (eggs) and the baby worms.

That's all there is to it. So go on, make compost. It will change your life and help save dear old planet earth!



Manx Organic Network in a nutshell

Membership: 502 households – representing 1060 people – and growing

Aims and objectives:

- To promote awareness of the benefits of organically produced food and sustainable agriculture.
- To promote Manx organic farmers and growers by encouraging consumers to buy locally produced organic food.
- To create a network of local resources, information and advice.
- To encourage the Manx Government to continue and increase its support for organic production.
- To develop an identifiable Manx Organic brand.

Contact:

Janet Bridle, Chair, 835436 or jbriple@manx.net

Viv Davies, Secretary, 882332
Manx Organic Network, c/o The Spinney, Howe Road, Port St Mary, IM9 5AU

www.manxorganicnetwork.com

For more membership forms to pass on to friends and relatives, please get in touch with Membership Secretary Susie Watson on 825755.

